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LAYAMON'S BRUT: AN EMERGENT EPIC

by



JOHN ROBERT BAXTER

A THESIS

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The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research, for acceptance, a thesis entitled "Layamon's Brut: An Emergent Epic" submitted by John Robert Baxter, in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

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ABSTRACT

Layamon's Brut, the most considerable English poem between Beowulf and the age of Chaucer, is, in many important respects, an epic poem. Often casually applied as a descriptive epithet suggesting the Brut's character, the term "epic" can be usefully employed to reveal the particular merits of this early English narrative. Layamon's motive for retelling an old story is chiefly patriotic, an impulse large enough to embrace the nobility of both the Britons and the Anglo-Saxons. Although inheriting a tradition of nationalistic historiography and writing in a period which saw the proliferation of courtly romance, Layamon, in most of his narrative additions, resorts to the older epic mode, drawing freely on the traditions of Anglo-Saxon poetry and sometimes showing signs of influence from classical epic. Many of these narrative additions work toward the aggrandizement of national heroes culminating in the majestic figure of Arthur. However, the character of Arthur, as depicted in the Brut, is too absolute, partakes too much of the nature of divinity, to be strictly in keeping with the tradition of the epic hero. More squarely in the tradition of epic is Layamon's use of an elevated style, although here there is an unresolved conflict between the fluent, connective syntax of the epic simile and the rigid paratactic structure of medieval epic. The Brut is by no means a sophisticated or highly polished narrative, but it participates in the epic mode to an extent that makes

discussion of the poem in terms of epic traditions a valid
method by which to understand Layamon's achievement.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Layamon's Brut is an ambitious work; sometimes fascinating, sometimes monotonous, but always replete with enthusiasm for the nobility of the partly historic, partly mythic forefathers of England. Layamon claims near the opening of his narrative

þæt he wolde of Engle;
þa æðelæn tellen.¹

(that he would tell the noble deeds of the English.)

So he does--expansively elaborating upon and luxuriating in his tale. Written ca. 1200,² the Brut is the most considerable English poem between Beowulf and the age of Chaucer. Geoffrey of Monmouth had traced the story of the Britons, stretching from the birth of the mythical Brutus, great-grandson of the Trojan Aeneas, to the last British king, Cadwallader, in his influential History of the Kings of Britain, written in Latin ca. 1136.³ In the twenty years following, the story was recounted several times, most notably by Robert Wace who completed his version ca. 1155⁴ and who added some of the courtesy and pageantry of courtly poetry. Although translating directly from Wace, and although following a period when Arthurian romance had blossomed in the work of Chrétien de Troyes and Marie de France, Layamon remains untouched by this tradition and reverts instead to the stern manner of Anglo-Saxon poetry. The reader of the Brut initially receives two dominant impressions about the poem: its enormous length and its essentially English character.

It is possible that this poem may be described, at least in part, as epic.

Certainly, the term "epic" is one which has been frequently bandied about throughout the history of critical and scholarly appreciation of the Brut, but seldom has it been applied in any carefully defined sense or with any attempt at comprehensive description. For example, Sir Frederic Madden, to whom we owe the magnificent, and so far the only complete, printed edition,⁵ calls Layamon "our English Ennius."⁶ Ennius has a reputation both as an epic poet and as one of the founders of the Latin language but Madden is mostly interested in the second facet of the English author's contribution:

... the colloquial character of much of the work renders it peculiarly valuable as a monument of language, since it serves to convey to us, in all probability, the current speech of the writer's time as it passed from mouth to mouth.⁷

He regards the poem as especially important because, as a specimen of the English language, it belongs to that transition period at the end of the twelfth and beginning of the thirteenth centuries during which the groundwork of Anglo-Saxon phraseology and grammar still existed but was gradually yielding to more popular forms of speech. Hence, he supplies a subtitle to the work: A Poetical Semi-Saxon Paraphrase of The Brut of Wace, which stresses its transitional nature. To be sure, it is Madden's interest in the poem as a philological document which produces his superb editorial work, but nonetheless his reference to Ennius also contains the hint of other riches to be found in Layamon.

Several modern critics since the turn of the century have continued to apply, casually, the term "epic" to the Brut. A number of them, such as Robert Fletcher and J.S.P. Tatlock, have been concerned to trace the development of the legendary history of Britain in general and the growth of the Arthurian legend in particular. Such an approach usually involves comparison with other versions of the legend and therefore the term "epic" is often used for its comparative value in delineating narrative styles rather than as a denotative description. Fletcher, for example, finds Wace elegant and vivacious, while Layamon is intense:

In all other respects, also, Layamon is a thorough Saxon, and he makes the story over into a Saxon epic. He is not afraid of homeliness and simplicity, and they appear often enough in his poem, but in the Homeric manner. His warriors are not only fearless and self-reliant, but of unrestrained impulses, emotional, boastful, and cruel.⁸

In other words, the suggestion is that the Brut has affinities with the earlier heroic poetry of the Anglo-Saxons and also with the epics of Greek antiquity, but Fletcher does not explore this suggestion any further. The bulk of his discussion consists of a useful enumeration of the ways in which the content of Layamon's work differs from that of his immediate predecessor, Wace.

In 1907, the year after Fletcher's work was first published, J.W.H. Atkins, writing for the Cambridge History of English Literature, discusses the Brut in the context of other literature written between 1150 and 1250. His conclusion is that the poem, along with The Owl and the

Nightingale, represents a literary revolt in which the claims of legend and fancy were advanced anew for recognition in a field where religion had held the monopoly. The two other chief works of the period, the Ormulum and the Ancren Riwe, are both squarely in the tradition of religious literature. Like Fletcher, Atkins resorts to the term "epic" in a rather casual sense which attempts to embrace the most characteristic features of Layamon's style. He argues that in the Brut

[the] most resonant lines deal with the conflict of warriors or with that of the elements. In such passages as those which describe the storm that over took Ursala (II, 74), or the wrestling match between Corineus and the giant (I, 79), he attains the true epic note, while his words gather strength from their alliterative setting.⁹

The "true epic note" is a tantalizing phrase which cries out for precise definition and which sounds like high praise, but beyond the notion that it involves a special kind of conflict it does not receive further attention. In addition, Atkins appears to mean that the Brut achieves an epic note in isolated episodes only and thus the term is only vaguely descriptive of a feeling the reader has at certain high points of the narrative.

Similarly, J.S.P. Tatlock in his survey of epic formulas in Layamon is forced to admit, in a footnote, that the Brut is not epic in any complete sense; however, as opposed to Atkins, he asserts that the epic note is maintained more consistently.

Of course Layamon's poem is not epic in structure, but it contains long episodes of that nature, and throughout is epic in manner and spirit.¹⁰

Over the years Tatlock has been one of Layamon's most devoted readers, but his attitude on this point tends to vacillate. The article on epic formulas, first published in 1923, is fairly cautious. He considers a ~~phrase~~ to be formula when it occurs three times or more in the poem, and counting formulas on this basis he comes to the conclusion that in terms of style Layamon seems as if he were feeling his way up to a standard form because formulas are less abundant in the early part of the poem and more abundant in the middle. However, in an article written for The Manly Anniversary Studies in Language and Literature and also published in 1923, caution is abandoned and he boldly asserts that Layamon's Brut is ". . . the chief traditional national epic of England. . . ."11 Clearly, at this point, Tatlock is employing the term "epic" in a very loose sense and also is ignoring the probability that in a similarly loose sense Beowulf might qualify as the chief traditional epic in English, although admittedly it is not nationalistic in the way the Brut is. By 1950, in The Legendary History of Britain, which one may suppose to be its author's definitive statement, Tatlock modifies his assertion and suggests that "the poem is the nearest thing we have to a traditional racial epic."12 Certainly, this represents a more moderate position, and Tatlock examines in some detail the first two terms of his descriptive phrase but does not return to the concept of epic. His chapter on "Lawman" (Tatlock's spelling preference), explores essentially three questions arising out of the Brut:

the transmutations which have taken place in the legendary history since Geoffrey of Monmouth's History of the Kings of Britain, the etymology of Layamon's name which provides, Tatlock argues, the clue to the author's racial sympathies, and the extent of Layamon's geographical knowledge of England which explains his enthusiasm for his native country. The reader still does not know how nearly the poem approaches epic.

A much fuller account of the traditional element in Layamon's poem is to be found in the work of H.C. Wyld¹³ and more recently in an essay by Dorothy Everett.¹⁴ Wyld's purpose is to demonstrate the essential English character of the poem and hence he quotes and comments on many vivid scenes; for example, Brutus' contemplating with delight the beauties and attractions of Britain, Arthur and Hoel's gazing with awe on the mysterious Loch Lomond, and the vivid simile which compares Childric, the Saxon, to a fox. As well, Wyld compares many scenes in the Brut with similar scenes in Beowulf. For example, Rowena's ritual of wæsheil-drincheil is likened to the ceremonial cup bearing performed by Wealhtheow, Hygd, and Freawaru; and Arthur's death and passage to Avalon is compared to the atmosphere of wonder and mystery which marks the death and departure of Scyld in Beowulf. Wyld's articles were written in the early 1930's and as a result of attempting to rescue the poem from comparative obscurity his pleas have a sort of evangelical zeal which occasionally sounds shrill. For example:

It is high time that students should recognize that here is one of the noblest landmarks in English poetry.¹⁵

He goes on to argue that the Brut is, in fact, superior to later alliterative poems such as Pearl or Gawain and the Green Knight. Most of Wyld's comparisons to the poetry of the earlier English tradition are made on the basis of similarity in terms of content or mood.

By contrast, Dorothy Everett's examination of the Brut's affinities with Anglo-Saxon poetic tradition is made on the basis of stylistic similarities and is, in general, a more reasoned and sober account. The relationship of Layamon to the Old English heroic poetry is not a matter of clear cut imitation. She warns:

. . . it should not be thought that the words meant to him just what they did in Old English heroic poetry. In Beowulf such words as hælep and duzup have reference to a particular kind of society; but duzup, which in certain passages in Beowulf meant "a body of tried retainers," "comitatus," is mostly used by Layamon in the vaguer sense of "body of men, host of warriors." And so it is with many other of the old words; something of their meaning has gone and they have become less pregnant, more generalized.¹⁶

Furthermore, she argues that, in a broad sense, the Brut suffers the disadvantages of the chronicle form. It is too diffuse. And while Layamon might have been able to overcome this difficulty by making Arthur, the most important figure in the poem, more human and credible, ". . . he cannot present a complete personality, not even a complete epic hero."¹⁷ Everett's argument serves to deter any absolute claim for the Brut as an epic poem. One of the impediments

which prevents the poem from rising to the status of epic lies in the general decay of the alliterative verse tradition in England. Classical alliterative verse is a highly-disciplined form using a four stress line, a strongly marked caesura, and alliteration as the means of linking half lines. By comparison, popular alliterative verse makes more frequent use of three stressed half lines, uses rhyme or assonance, with or without alliteration to join the half lines, and increases the number of unstressed syllables. Also, it employs self-contained lines more frequently, that is, a single line expressing a complete sense unit (this practice often results in the use of an expletive tag to fill in the second half line), and generally uses a longer as well as looser structure than the classical line. Everett's conclusion is that the early Middle English alliterative metre is simply "a poorer vehicle of expression than Old English 'classical' metre."¹⁸ The general tendency, then, of Everett's comments is to reduce Layamon's claim as an epic poet.

However, another stylistic analysis comes to grips with what is a typical device employed in epic poetry--the extended simile. While long similes are unheard of in the Anglo-Saxon literary tradition,¹⁹ Layamon includes several of them in his poem. But, as H.S. Davies has discovered, most of the extended similes are grouped in one small section of the narrative, namely, the part dealing with Arthur's Saxon wars. Davies thinks that the disappearance of this major stylistic advance after the Saxon campaign

. . . strongly suggests that in this part of the poem, and nowhere else, Layamon was under the immediate influence of a particular model, a source which he was here using in addition to Wace.²⁰

Although this argument deprives Layamon of the credit for originality, it does focus attention on a peculiar feature of English poetic style--a feature which is markedly epic in character and which therefore is worthy of further analysis.

Finally,²¹ two lengthy comparative studies of Layamon's Brut deserve mention. In Layamon's Brut: A Comparative Study in Narrative Art Frances L. Gillespy's primary purpose is to analyze the narrative art of Layamon but she does this through extensive comparison with Wace's Roman de Brut, focusing particularly on the discrepancies between the two narratives.²² Written in 1916, her study has long been a valuable indicator of the unique features of the Brut. Especially helpful is her discussion of Layamon's dramatic method which, by comparison at least with Wace, shows the English author's excellent handling of orations. These are sometimes developed with considerable psychological subtlety. An example occurs in the challenge which Frolle issues to Arthur where we see an interesting combination of feigned and real motives--the speech becomes a sort of mask of bravery which serves to highlight the absolute courage of Arthur. Gillespy, in fact, argues in several places that the speeches, particularly in their ceremonial formality, are of an epic sort, often consisting of boasts, threats, and taunts, and often exhibiting the typical Germanic hero's lack of measure.

Though she does not pursue the question, the frequent occurrence of such speeches, along with several other features already noted, may propel the Brut closer toward the epic genre than she suggests.

The other comparative analysis, Studies in the Narrative Technique of "Beowulf" and Lawman's "Brut", was published in 1968 by Hakan Ringbom and is in many ways the fullest treatment of the poem in English criticism so far.²³ Like Gillespy, Ringbom compares the poem to Wace's narrative, but his chief intention is to compare the narrative technique of Beowulf and the Brut, and he concludes his work with an essay on the continuity of Old English and Early Middle English poetry. His main assumption is that

. . . such traits in Lawman's Brut as have no or hardly any parallels in Wace but are typical of Old English poetry may be particularly important for an understanding of the development of the earliest English narrative tradition.²⁴

Ringbom discovers a number of similarities between Beowulf and the Brut. Both poems demonstrate a conspicuous moral attitude on the part of the narrator; the reader is never in any doubt about where his sympathies ought to lie. Related to this is a fundamental juxtaposition of opposites such as good and evil, past happiness and present misery. Each poem makes extensive use of contrast often in the form of anticipatory remarks foreboding disaster which are placed in the midst of rejoicings or celebrations. And both poets seem to adopt a predominantly deterministic attitude toward human existence--the ultimate determiner of events is variously called wyrd or the will of God. Finally,

although Ringbom avoids any attempt to define the genre of Layamon's Brut, and in a footnote suggests that the poem probably would not fit into any established literary category,²⁵ he concludes with reference to narrative structure that

Lawman's process of amplifying his French source has traits in common with the development from lay to epic.²⁶

At this point it is necessary to turn attention away from a survey of Layamon criticism in order to attempt a brief sketch of the development of the epic genre in general, and to discover what sort of epic theory might have been available to Layamon. It is evident that almost all critics endeavoring to deal with Layamon's poem sooner or later come to use the term "epic" in a more or less adventitious manner. Clearly, the designation must perform some useful function and yet for the most part that function is left extremely vague. While it may be nearly impossible, it is surely desirable to clarify what the term "epic," or more specifically "medieval epic," can mean and in addition to ascertain how justifiably one may ascribe the term to Layamon's Brut.

In seeking to discover what it is that Beowulf, Finnsburg, Maldon, and the Brut have in common, Ringbom begins with the most obvious feature--an heroic outlook. However, heroic poetry, as defined by Sir Maurice Bowra,²⁷ does not equal epic poetry. The Finnsburg Fragment, Ringbom points out, has the typical characteristics of the lay style--a quick tempo with no digressions, short speeches, a heavy concentration

on action, swift changes of focus, and abrupt transitions-- a simple, direct style with little ornament. By contrast, he argues, the epic style is more expansive, more ready to explore fully the details of the society it describes.

Following the lead of a number of other critics, notably Alistair Campbell and Alan Markman,²⁸ Ringbom suggests that the lay style seems to have given rise to the epic style. The epic hero had to earn his fame in lays and folksongs before he could achieve immortality in epic form. Furthermore, there is a certain basic difference between the heroic outlook which is manifested in the Brut and The Fattle of Maldon and that which is depicted in Beowulf and Finnsburg.

Underlying Maldon is a current of national sentiment of the same kind as later brought about the writing of Geoffrey's Historia and Lawman's Brut. We have the evil foreigners who invade England, using all their cunning tricks, and the brave defenders who put up a heroic resistance fighting for their country. National honour is a fundamental value underlying both Maldon and the Brut, and an important aim of the two poems is to describe and glorify the attempts to preserve national integrity.²⁹

Another scholar, writing from a much broader perspective, is in essential agreement with these critics of Old English verse. Ernst R. Curtius argues that the transition from the short heroic lay to the Anglo-Saxon and Middle High German heroic epic was affected by the example of Virgil who for his part follows Homer.³⁰ Thus the lay expands and becomes a poem in praise of ancestors and race. In this way Curtius supports the notion that there is a natural development from lay to epic and, as well, that under the influence of Virgil the appearance of nationalistic sentiments

is a logical progression. But it is a commonplace of criticism to say that medieval epic is derived from Virgil. R.R. Bolgar sums it up best.

The epic tradition was based mainly on the conscientious study of Virgil, and the extent to which that study was carried as well as the technical triumphs which resulted from it had already been demonstrated in the tenth century Waltharius. In Ekkehard's great poem the new wine of German heroic legend sparkles with superb effect in the glass of classical form. Not only the language, but many of the devices through which the story is presented, the carefully planned confusion of the battle scenes, the boasts, the debates, the personal combats, the occasional laments are all Virgilian in their origin.³¹

Bolgar also accords a sort of secondary status in the hierarchy of model epic writers to Lucan and Statius.

The difficulty, however, lies in attempting to determine how far Layamon may have been directly acquainted with any of these writers. Lucan is perhaps the closest classical parallel to Layamon because his narrative also employs the chronicle structure and because his story is a series of sensational scenes linked by a tenuous thread of historical probability. Robert Graves calls him "the father of yellow journalism."³² But while Geoffrey of Monmouth refers explicitly to Lucan, neither Wace nor Layamon repeats the reference. Tatlock suggests that in his similes Layamon ". . . may have remembered from long ago the impressiveness of some Virgilian similes,"³³ but H.S. Davies' observation that this stylistic device disappears in the last third of the Brut seems to prove that Layamon was not consciously aware of the potency of the device. It is possible, therefore,

that Layamon did not read either Virgil or Lucan with any thoroughness and perhaps did not read them at all. Yet epic was popular reading in the Middle Ages and surely one may assume that a literate medieval priest who could write alliterative English verse, translate French, and read at least some Latin would be tolerably well acquainted with standard reading material of his day. Paul M. Clogan in The Medieval Achilleid of Statius claims that both the Achilleid and the Thebaid were widely used as texts in medieval schools from the tenth century onwards. Although Statius completed only two books of the Achilleid (which treats the early life of Achilles), the Liber Catonianus, a popular medieval schoolbook, divides the narrative into not two but five books. Clogan interprets this division as a Medieval attempt to make the work into a complete epic.³⁴ But since we know so little of Layamon's personal history it is impossible to say for certain what books he read (cf. the Brut l. 10), and although he may have had a passing acquaintance with classical epic theory and practice, the evidence is scanty.

More to the point, perhaps, is the question of Layamon's acquaintance with contemporary epic theory and practice and the ways in which that might differ from the classical mode. W.P. Ker was one of the first scholars to draw attention to the shift which occurred in the twelfth century away from the epic tradition toward a new poetic form, the romance.³⁵ The Brut, therefore, is conspicuous in terms of literary

history because, although written probably at the end of the twelfth century, it stoutly resists infiltrations of the new form. Erich Auerbach has argued that for eleventh, twelfth, and thirteenth century audiences the heroic epic was equivalent to history and that the vernacular chronicles composed ca. 1200 were strongly influenced by the epic style.³⁶ The heroic epic is history insofar as it recalls actual historical conditions and insofar as its characters always perform a historico-political function. In fact, according to Auerbach, the historico-political function of the hero's actions is precisely what most distinguishes epic from romance.

The last flowerings of the epic tradition in this period are often called chansons de geste. John Finlayson provides an excellent summary of the chief characteristics of chanson de geste:³⁷ a preoccupation with the problem of heroic valour, an expression of values associated with war, a reliance on oration and dialogue to carry the action forward (we are not immediately conscious of a narrator), a lack of *mésure* which frequently causes the hero's death, and a public context in which the hero demonstrates his skill. Perhaps the most famous work in this genre is the Chanson de Roland, to which Erich Auerbach devotes an intensive discussion in chapter five of Mimesis.³⁸ Auerbach's analysis is particularly enlightening because he proceeds by comparing the style of the medieval French epic to classical theories of style. A noticeable feature

of the Chanson de Roland is the use of parataxis. Auerbach claims that in the classical languages paratactic constructions belong to the low style; they are oral rather than written, comic and realistic rather than elevated. But in the Chanson de Roland parataxis belongs to the elevated style; it is a new form of the elevated style dependent not on periodic flow and rhetorical figures but on the power of juxtaposed and independent verbal blocks. Auerbach finds the compression and narrowness of this style to be consistent with the medieval world-view in which the principles of society are few in number and in which nothing of fundamental significance is problematic--the categories of this life and the next are unambiguous and immutable. This style tends to develop a strong ritualistic element of impressive gestures; in fact, the purpose of the style is to make the "scenic moment"³⁹ assume the stature of a moral model; the gesture or image becomes charged with symbolic significance. Medieval narrative may be likened to medieval manuscript illumination--it is a series of thematically related pictures each set off by a heavy border in syntactic and sensory independence.⁴⁰ Finally, in the medieval epic the number of characters who actually maintain the action is very small.

The variously altering relationship between a large number of persons, with the consequent involvement and element of adventure so characteristic of epic elsewhere, is here completely lacking.⁴¹

Thus, the medieval epic is characterized by paratactic construction, narrow focus, impressive gesture, and few

main characters. It should be informative, therefore, to examine Layamon's Brut in the light of these generalizations which set medieval epic somewhat apart from classical epic, although there is no escaping the fact that in this genre the standard is ultimately set by Homer and Virgil.

In conclusion, then, it is readily apparent that critics of the Brut have often relied on the term "epic" to convey something of their impression of the poem, but that there has been no careful investigation of the ways in which the poem does and does not meet the requirements of the genre. Such an investigation should enlarge our understanding of the poem. There is no avoiding the fact that many difficulties are involved, because of the conflicting demands of the chronicle and epic forms, the incomplete knowledge of Layamon's sources, and the differences in medieval and classical theories of epic art. However, with the warning and encouragement of a recent writer on the subject of epic these difficulties are no deterrent.

The student who wants to pass beyond the historian's rule of thumb and to speak more searchingly of the epic must not seem to assert too much. Aware of literature's natural resistance to tidiness, he yet considers the historian's groups with an intuition of norms less obvious and more essential than the superficial conventions, norms which no single poem fully embodies. He knows that in any exact sense a pure epic has never been written. And yet he intuitively an epic mode which Homer's emulators approach along with Homer and with the authors of other heroic poems which attain a certain magnitude and value.⁴²

Different poems may participate in the epic mode to varying degrees; the purpose of this thesis is to discover the extent of participation in Layamon's Brut.

II. LAYAMON: INTENTIONS AND SENTIMENTS

C.S. Lewis in A Preface to Paradise Lost begins by claiming that "the first qualification for judging any piece of workmanship from a corkscrew to a cathedral is to know what it is--what it was intended to do and how it is meant to be used."¹ In the case of Milton the problem, at least, is clear. The poem is an epic; the author himself says so and therefore the task which Lewis, as critic, takes up is comparatively straightforward. He attempts a definition of the concept of epic as it existed before Milton's time and then compares that definition with what happens in the poem. In the case of Layamon the problem is complicated by the uncertainty of what the author himself intended his poem to be. The reader of the Brut is likely to feel the same sensations of puzzlement and attraction which Layamon experienced when he first viewed his sources, "þa leaf wende./ he heom leofliche bi-heold." (46-47) (turned over the leaves and lovingly he beheld them). What kind of poem did he think he was writing? Did he think of himself as a scribe or an artist? What were his motives in retelling a story which was already enjoying a wide circulation?

After the proem the narrative begins:

Nu seið mid loft songe;
þe wes on leoden preost.
al swa þe boc speke;
þe he to bisne inom. (68-71)

(Now saith with lofty song he who was priest on earth all as the books speak that he took for pattern.)

These lines reveal an interesting fusion of the concepts of oral recitation and written records. The "lofty song" illustrates both the value the author places on his story and his notion of himself in the tradition of poet-singer. As with the Old English scop who sang or recited his tale orally, Layamon seems to consider that the tale is, in some measure, his own property if only because it is he at that precise moment who is reciting it. But the quotation also illustrates the characteristically medieval dependence on and admiration for other writers as authorities. This is the second assurance in seventy-one lines that the author is following the "pattern" of other books--books written by such impressive figures as Bede, Albin and Austin (respectively, the Abbot of St. Augustine's, Canterbury, 708-32 and St. Augustine, mentioned frequently in Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People), as well as Wace. And the "al swa" of l. 70 gives emphasis to Layamon's genuine desire to give a faithful rendering. Thus, early in the poem, a tension is set up between fidelity to one's sources and the irresistible urge toward personal expression. Fidelity equals respectability; it means that the story is worth reading because it is true and because it is the factual record of events passed down through generations. On the other hand, personal expression is necessary because it recreates experience; it causes the reader to know what it felt like to be living in another age and therefore it makes history doubly worth reading. This tension between

two modes of expression is one thing that makes the Brut fascinating reading; it is also what creates the perplexity as to what kind of poem the Brut is.

Ostensibly, Layamon's narrative is history. The phrase by which he refers to himself twice in the early lines of the poem, the priest in the land or among the people, together with the fact that he writes in the vernacular suggest that he thought of himself as a kind of common man's guide to British antiquity. The attraction is obviously the glorious history of those who first possessed England, and the "noble deeds of the English" are surely of interest to those who still dwell in the land, not a little because the glory of ancestors is a compliment and an encouragement to descendants. The honour of the land reaches an apex with the plenary court Arthur holds at Kaerleon-on-Usk on Whitsunday.²

þeo biscopes gunnen singen.
 biuoren þan leod-kinge.
 bemen þer bleowen.
 bellen þer ringeden.
 crihtes gunnen riden.
 wifmen forð gliden.
 To iwissen hit is isaid.
 and soð hit is ifunden.
 þat no isæh no mon nauer ær.
 mid eorðliche monne her.
 half swa hahne ricchedom.
 a nauer nane hepen.
 swa mid Arðure was.
 afeles cunnes. (24482-24496)

(the bishops gan sing before the monarch; trumpets there blew; bells there rung; knights gan ride, women forth glide. In certainty it is said, and sooth it is found, that no man ever ere saw here with earthly men half so great pomp, in ever any assembly as was with Arthur, of noble race.)

The slow, stately movement of the lines with numerous repetitions accords well with the pomp and splendour of the whole scene. It is certainly a scene of epic grandeur. None of these lines is in Wace and they therefore represent the extent of Layamon's imaginative participation in his narrative. The passage is permeated with a sense of legendary splendour. Layamon's Brut thus combines history and legend, a blend of story which is the raw material of epic. How closely it approaches epic standards is the question that remains to be answered.

It is enlightening to compare the purposes of two of Layamon's precursors in the matter of Britain, Geoffrey of Monmouth and Robert Wace. Their works are also not strictly classifiable, and both contain a mixture of history, romance, legend and epic. Geoffrey's purpose is mainly historical; he desires to tell a plain story and has "gathered no gaudy flowers of speech in other men's gardens."³ How far he succeeds in this regard is another question altogether but the fact remains that his vision is essentially historical and his accomplishment is best judged on historical grounds, as Robert Hanning concludes:

Geoffrey's contribution to the imaginative historiography of the early Middle Ages may be summed up as a removal from history of the idea of eschatological fulfillment, in both its national and personal manifestations. . . . Geoffrey's story of the fall of Britain lacks, in short, the moral dimension provided in the versions of Gildas and Bede by the theology of history.⁴

In other words, he has replaced an ecclesiastical universal

view of history with a more limited secular, national view of history. In the former, all persons and nations are linked by a common relationship to the first creation and the final judgement; in the latter the fortunes of the nation are interpreted essentially without the help of theology. Geoffrey's Biblical references are inserted not as a moral comment but as a chronological guideline.

Similarly, even his references to other genres are tinged with historical preoccupations. The one epic author he chooses to cite by name is Lucan, the most historical of epic writers,⁵ and the citation is made for the purely historical reason of characterizing the war between the Britons and the Romans under Caesar's leadership, which war perfectly exemplifies Geoffrey's main theme of the nobility of a nation fighting for liberty. He writes:

They [the Britons] were ready to die for their fatherland and for their liberty. This is why Lucan praised them, when he wrote about Caesar: Territa quesitis ostendit terga Britannis. (he ran away in terror from the Britons whom he had come to attack) Pharsalia, II, 572.⁶

Lucan, obviously, had very little sympathy for Caesar. John Clark in A History of Epic Poetry claims that Lucan's poem fails as epic precisely because his "subject is a historic subject, and a historic subject of the near past."⁷ His matter was "untransmutable"; that is, he knew too much about the historical character of his heroes and this, as shown in his contemptuous treatment of Caesar, prevents him from creating the idealized heroes necessary to support the grandeur demanded by the epic genre. Layamon, by

contrast, omits any direct reference to Lucan, as does Wace, and his treatment of Caesar is markedly different from either that of Lucan or Geoffrey. In Layamon's mind the legendary conqueror has superseded the historical persona and he openly admires a heroic Julius Caesar:

Cniht he wes kene;
 3eond al middel-ærde cud.
 he wes þe wisseste mon;
 of al þe worulde riche. . . .
 wale þat eære ei sucche mon;
 in to eælde sculde gan. (7215-7225)

(Knight he was keen, over all middle-earth renowned; he was the wisest man of all the world's empire Alas! that ever any such man should go into hell!)

Such comments are the most generous that the medieval priest, acting within the strict limits of Christian decorum, ever allows himself to make on a heathen character. Such largesse extended to heroes is a characteristic feature of epic where heroes must be admired whether they fight for or against the enemy, a principle most profoundly illustrated in Homer's treatment of Hector and Virgil's of Turnus. Hence, Layamon turns away from the limitations of Geoffrey's historical outlook and toward the potentially greater freedom, in an artistic sense, of legend or epic.

Since much doubt exists over whether Layamon even knew Geoffrey's work, it is, perhaps, misleading to draw comparisons at too great length between the two authors. Layamon's more immediate debt is to Wace, yet even here comparisons can be deceptive. Criticism (especially criticism written in English) often asserts the superiority of the English writer over the French artist.⁸ This may be true but at

the same time it does not seem to take sufficient account of the difference in purpose. Wace's purpose is to entertain the court as can be seen in several episodes which achieve the tone of courtly love poetry,⁹ and if it is true that his book was dedicated to Queen Eleanor, it is natural that he should be preoccupied with courtly refinements. His recurrent phrase "ne sai" is a mark of greater sophistication; he is more skeptical of the truth of his story as history and more ready to think of the whole matter as a sort of imaginative game, a courtly pastime. On the other hand, Layamon's earnestness, his refusal to doubt the verity of any element in the story, shows his preoccupation with the consciousness of the race and since there is no doubt about the existence of the race there is no room for doubt about the story. Wace's gaiety and lightness of tone tend toward romance; Layamon's seriousness tends toward epic. The differences in the two authors are differences in attitude and purpose. Comparisons between the two will hereafter be used not for the sake of comparative evaluation but more simply for what they can reveal about how Layamon thought of his material.

It would be unusual if a medieval priest, particularly one who betrays such a genuine devotional attitude as Layamon does in his poem, were to exclude all ecclesiastical concerns from his narrative. Despite the fact that he has inherited a story of national origins and national destiny from Geoffrey and Wace, he attempts in a number of places

throughout the narrative to infuse a sense of universal significance. This attempt is seen especially in references to Noah and his sons, as in the proem, where he claims that he will tell the story of those who first came to England

æfter þan flode;
 þe from drihtene com.
 þe al her aquelde;
 quic þat he funde.
 buten Noe and Sem;
 Japhet and Cham.
 and heore four wiues;
 þe mid heom weren on archen. (19-26)

(after the flood that came from the Lord; that destroyed here all that it found alive, except Noah and Sem, Japhet and Cham, and their four wives who were with them in the ark.)

It is also seen when he claims that Julius was the first man that put this land in subjection

seodden Noe and his sunnen;
 of þære arche weoren icumen. (8986-8987)

(since Noah and his sons were come out of the ark.)

Clearly, the story of Noah has a special seminal significance. It embodies both the creation and the last judgment insofar as the flood is a judgment and punishment of all those who are sinful, while the survival of Noah and his kin places them in the position of founding family for the human race very much as Adam and Eve were in the earlier creation story. Thus all men are the descendants of Noah as well as of Adam.

A dominant feature of the ninth century Historia Brittonum compiled reputedly by Nennius is a large number of origin stories. In one of them Noah's sons each set out to repopulate a continent: Shem to Asia, Ham to Africa, and

Japheth to Europe. Nennius gives several accounts of the founding of Britain. In one of them Britto, the eponym of Britain, is the son Hessitio, son of Alanus, who, through a long line of intermediate ancestors including Aeneas and Anchises, is descended from Japheth, son of Noah.¹⁰ As Robert Hanning explains:

The aim of this improbable series of genealogies is simply to emphasize the relationship among all men and connect them all to God. It is the approach of a Christian rather than a nationalist.¹¹

It would seem that Layamon's insistence on the importance of Noah is based on information passed down by Nennius whose work he either knew directly or of whose story he was aware through popular tradition.

Another example which illustrates Layamon's desire to attach an ecclesiastical, universal significance to his narrative is the inclusion of the Pope Gregory story.¹² Gregory sees English captives in Rome and upon hearing them called "Angles" he puns on the word "angels." This charming episode leads to an immediate decision to send a mission headed by Augustine to Christianize the English. The story is not referred to by either Wace or Geoffrey and is ultimately borrowed from Bede.¹³ Thus, Layamon's citation of Bede as one of his sources is not so gratuitous as is sometimes thought, and if his material borrowings are not numerous, yet in this episode at least he is linked with his venerable predecessor. By including the episode, he stresses the conversion of the English to the extent that in the late stages of the narrative many pious Anglo-Saxons win his

sympathy in favor of certain impious British opponents, a shift in sympathy which never occurs in Geoffrey or Wace where the division between protagonist and antagonist is drawn more clearly along racial lines.

Layamon then, occasionally stresses religion over racialism and aligns himself with such ecclesiastics as Bede or Gildas for whom, as R.W. Hanning explains, national origins have no significance:

. . . the events of past and present were adapted to the biblical and exegetical scheme, and the only origins that mattered were the origins of Israel, of the New Israel, and of the Christian. Just as national disaster prefigured the final judgement, so national beginnings were important at a personal level, i.e., in terms of conversion.¹⁴

For example, an important beginning in Bede's Ecclesiastical History is the conversion of Northumbria.¹⁵ He documents the conversion very carefully and includes the letters in which Pope Boniface exhorts King Edwin to accept the faith. He enlivens the account with several fascinating details such as the attempted assassination of Edwin, who is saved by the intervention of a devoted thegn, Lilla, the vision revealed to Edwin while in exile at the court of Rædwald, and the conversion of Coifi, the chief priest of the old religion. Bede's is a thoroughly Christian view of divine providence in operation through history; the conversion of Northumbria has eschatological significance. History for Bede is a progress toward universal order.

The chronicle tradition, on the other hand, shows a progress toward the founding of a national order often at

the expense of other nations. Ultimately, it is this tradition which is the predominant influence in Layamon's work. The Historia Brittonum contains, in addition to the Biblical-origin story noted above, three other origin stories, including the one adopted by Geoffrey. This multiplicity of origin stories demonstrates a feeling of ambivalence about which view of history ought to be given precedence. Layamon's viewpoint partakes of a similar ambivalence. The fact that he is translating a work from the nationalistic, chronicle tradition tends to mitigate against his affinity for the ecclesiastical tradition. Apart from certain isolated incidents his story is a national one.

An even more important factor, however, contributing to the amplification of the national aspects of the story is to be found in Layamon's patriotism, his admiration for the glorious heroes of Britain's past. When he laments the destruction of the British cities terminating with the Normans "with their evil crafts," his lament is elegaic:

þus is þas burh i-uaren?
 seodden heo ærest wes aræraed.
 þus is þis eit-lond?
 i-gon from honde to hond.
 þet alle þa burhges.
 þe Brutus iwrohte.
 And heora noma gode?
 þa on Brutus dæi stode.
 beoð swide afelled?
 þurh warf of þon folke. (2061-2070)

(Thus has this burgh fared, since it first was reared; thus has this island passed from hand to hand, so that all the burghs that Brutus wrought, and their good names, that in Brutus day stood, are greatly destroyed through change of the people!)

Things have changed, and changed, perhaps, for the worse but that does not depreciate the nobility of Britain's past. Nennius likewise laments the present degeneration of the British: "I was indignant, that the name of my own people, formerly famous and distinguished, should sink into oblivion, and like smoke be dissipated."¹⁶ By contrast, Gildas heaps nothing but vituperation on the British when he claims his purpose is "to relate the deeds of an indolent and slothful race, rather than the exploits of those who have been valiant in the field."¹⁷ The outraged priest sees nothing worthy of acclaim in the whole history of the British nation and the only possible value there could be in national history is that by studying it the present generation may be encouraged to avoid the sins of the past. Nennius and Layamon, however, find solace in remembering the heroism of antiquity and this makes an enormous difference, especially in the case of Layamon. Where fame has come once, it may come again.

Finally, Layamon's status as a national poet is consolidated by the style of his language. The colloquial character of his language represents a struggle to reaffirm the native tongue as a literary language in the midst of two more prestigious languages, Latin and French. This struggle is symbolized by the fact that preceding Layamon, the two major versions of the legendary history are written in those languages. Every literary critic who writes about the Brut has observed Layamon's debt to the traditions of

Anglo-Saxon literature.¹⁸ F.L. Gillespie exclaims that his "extended and astonishingly pure English vocabulary at once establishes a presumption in favor of wide reading in his own language,"¹⁹ and she notes examples such as the use of alliterative law terms: "sibbe and sæhten," "writ and worde," "grid and frid." J.S.P. Tatlock finds in the closing couplet of the poem a close paraphrase of a line from The Proverbs of Alfred.²⁰

iwurde þet iwurde!
iwurde Godes wille. (32240-32241)

(happen what happen, happen Gods will!)

There are, of course, innumerable examples of Anglo-Saxon traditions operating in the poem, both in the more minute aspects of style such as diction and metrics and in the larger aspects such as character delineation and type scenes. Examples useful to the present purpose are those which carry epic connotations. In each version of the legendary history certain heroes notably Brutus, Brennes, Belin and Arthur stand out as having superior endowments. The two brothers are an especially interesting case because, although both are obviously cast in the heroic mold, Belin is a steadfast leader of his people morally and physically, while Brennes' heroic exploits are sometimes directed against his country. While Brennes remains after the conquest of Rome, Belin returns to end his reign in a time of unequalled peace and prosperity. Because of his excellence as a king, his people are logically sorrowful at his death and in each version of the story his burial is treated with ceremony.

Geoffrey relates that "his body was cremated and the ash enclosed in a golden urn."²¹ In Wace this is slightly expanded:

Deus! tant li poples le plora.
Li cors fud ars, la cendre prise
Si fud en un baril d'or mise.²²

(Lord! the people wept for him a great deal.
The body was cremated, the ashes taken and placed
in cask of gold.)

In Layamon the whole ceremony is amplified in the heroic Germanic tradition so that it acquires a sense of epic importance. Belin's role as a provider to his people is emphasized to the extent that in his day people perished by many thousands not through battle but through excess of meat and drink. The description of the burial ceremony includes many lavish additions.

sari wes his dūgeder
wa wes heom on lūe.
for þæs kinges dæde
Heo ferden to his horde.
and nome þer mucche deal goldes
heo makeden ane tunne.
of golde and of ȝimmes
þene king heo duden þer inne.
þat wes here louerd Belin
up heo hine duden heȝe.
an ufenmeste þan turre
þat men mihte hine bi-halden.
wide ȝeon þeon lande
þat heo duden for muchelern lūe.
for he wes here dure læuerd. (6075-6089)

(Sorry was his people, woe was to them in life
for the king's death! They went to his hoard
and there took a great deal of gold; they made
a tun of gold and of gems; the king they placed
therein, who was their lord, Belin; they raised
him up high on the upmost part of the tower,
so that men might him behold wide over the land.
That they did for great love, for he was their
dear lord.)

Many of the details here come out of the same tradition which lies behind the description of Beowulf's burial.

Geworhton ða Wedra lēode
 hl(æw) on [h]līde, sē wæs hēah ond brād,
 (wæ)glīdendum wide g(e)sýne,
 ond betimbredon on tȳn dagum
 beadurōfes bēcn, bronda lāfe
 wealle beworhton, swā hyt weorðlicost
 foresnotre men findan mihton.
 Hī on beorg dydon bēg ond siglu,
 eall swylce hyrsta, swylce on horde ær
 niðhēdige men genumen hæfdon.²³

(Then people of the Geats raised a mound upon the cliff, which was high and broad and visible from far by voyagers on sea; and in ten days they built the beacon of the warrior bold in battle.)

The remnant of the burning they begirt with a wall in such sort as skilled men could plan most worthy of him. In the barrow they placed collars and brooches--all such adornments as brave-minded men had before taken from the hoard.²⁴⁾

The importance of treasure as a symbol of the hero's glory is stressed in both poems. In creating a sense of abundant treasure buried with the king, Layamon is much closer to the Beowulf-poet than to Geoffrey or Wace. Like the Anglo-Saxon poet he makes it clear that the treasure is legitimately the property of the hero. Belin's men go to "his hoard" while Beowulf's retainers take riches from the dragon's hoard after their lord has made it safe to do so. The adjective niðhēdige is surely a sarcastic reference to their earlier lack of courage and indicates that without the bravery of the hero they would never get near enough to touch the treasure. In both poems the remains of the hero are placed in some kind of enclosure which appears to be constructed especially for the occasion, as opposed to

Geoffrey's ready-made golden urn or Wace's barril d'or. Both English poets emphasize the height to which the body is raised, although in Beowulf's case it is an earth barrow whereas Layamon follows Geoffrey and Wace in placing Belin in a tower. Both emphasize that men will be able to see the burial place from far and wide. The homage paid to each hero at his death is a mark of the esteem his people have for his heroic qualities and the tomb is both a monument to the glory of the past and an inspiration to the future. The added emphasis Layamon thus gives to the heroism of Belin is appropriate in view of the fact that it is the example of Belin and his brother which is a major factor in motivating Arthur later in the narrative to undertake Roman conquest. Layamon is able to give added dimensions to the heroic aspects of his tale by building on the epic strain found in his native literature.

In view of his inheritance of the Anglo-Saxon literary tradition, it may well be wondered what sort of patriotism the author intends, since throughout most of the poem the Britons are clearly the protagonists and for more than half of it the Anglo-Saxons are the antagonists. R.S. Loomis voices the standard critical shibboleth:

Ironically enough, the poet who set out to celebrate the noble deeds of the English followed through to the end a book in which that race is held up to execration. Ironically, too, it uses the language, the poetic form, and the style of the people it disparages.²⁵

But this is too facile. After the disappearance of Arthur, Merlin's prophecy is quoted:

pat an Ardur sculde ȝete
cum Anglen to fulste. (28650-28651)

(that an Arthur should yet come to help the English.)

In other words, the British Arthur is the English hope, and while Madden may be right in claiming that Anglen is a scribal error²⁶ the feeling that Layamon makes no careful categorical distinction in regards to patriotism persists. "The deeds of the English" (13-14) is meant to refer to all the successive races who hold power in England for any length of time. Gillespy's account seems just:

The concept of patriotism . . . that will explain the treatment throughout the work is that it is a patriotism of country rather than of races--a patriotism, moreover, that does not interfere with the author's sense of dramatic propriety.²⁷

Layamon's chief concern is thus seen to be the rendering of the glorious past of England. Gillespy finds that many instances where a "race is held up to execration" are found in dramatic situations and are uttered by characters who in context have good rhetorical reason to execrate. Furthermore, patriotism in the Brut is often subordinated to a strong sense of moral righteousness, an aspect clearly seen in the murder of Oswald "pas heȝes godes icorne" (31323) (the chosen of the high God) who suffers treachery at the hands of both the Saxon Penda and the Briton Cadwalan.

An interesting example of how Layamon aligns his sympathies with the heroic and the righteous rather than with a character who may happen to belong to a particular race is to be seen in the conflict between Cadwalan and Edwin. In the first place he is fascinated by the significance of brother

relationships, a fascination earlier demonstrated in his handling of the Brennes-Belin kinship, and he therefore adds an extended laudation on the peace and amity established by Æluric and Cadwan, the respective fathers of Edwin and Cadwalan.

per iwurden sahte.
 þa kinges beie tweien.
 sæhte and some.
 heo custen well ilome.
 þas kinges well ilomen.
 mid luue heo icusten.
 eorl custe oðer.
 swulc hit weore his broðer.
 sweines þer plozeden.
 blisse wes mid þeinen. (30038-30047)

(There became reconciled the kings both twain;
 reconciled and united they kissed well often;
 these kings well often with love them kissed;
 earl kissed other, as if it were his brother;
 swains there played, bliss was with the thanes!)

The two kings seal their feeling of brotherhood by taking wives on the same day, begetting on the same night sons who are born on a same day, and raised together:

For to uæsten þa luuen.
 of leofuen heore uæderen. (30076-30077)

(For to confirm the love of their loved fathers.)

In describing the death of the fathers, and the accession of the sons to the kingship, Layamon adds to his sources the curious detail that the archbishop of Canterbury forbade the kings to assume the crown, until he came himself, and set it on their heads. The command is obeyed until Cadwalan on his side of the Humber becomes dissatisfied and orders the archbishop to come to London where he beseeches him to bestow the crown. Although the archbishop is involved, it

is not at all clear that he consents or is even present at the crowning ceremony for the narrative states simply "there men soon made Cadwalan king." On hearing of this proceeding, Edwin sends messengers to Cadwalan appealing to him as a "brother and for the great love that their parents held" to allow him (Edwin) also to receive his crown. Cadwalan, following the advice of a certain thegn named Brian, refuses to give his consent on the grounds that the whole realm is the property of the Britons. He proposes to seize Northumberland and kill or evict the Saxons. Layamon, in a narrative aside, makes it perfectly clear that it is Cadwalan, the British king, who is at fault.

Wa wes Cadwalan,
 þat he wes on liven.
 for he bigon þene swikedom,
 uppen his sweord broderen.
 and þer uore him self hafde,
 hærm þene meste. (30521-30526)

(Woe was Cadwalan, that he was alive, for he began the treachery upon his sworn brother and therefore had himself harm the most!)

This emphasis on the betrayal of a brotherhood between a Saxon and a Briton symbolizes Layamon's concept of patriotism--a patriotism which glorifies the noble ancestry of the country, those who are heroic and righteous regardless of race.

In fact, another curious feature of the whole episode is the appearance of numerous suggestions which link the Saxon king Edwin to the greatest of British kings, Arthur. Like Arthur, Edwin is characterized by the epithet "ærhden

bideled" (30386) (void of fear) and his valour evokes the use of the nature simile, a figure vigorously used throughout the Arthurian portion of the narrative but not much in evidence in the later parts. It appears when Edwin first learns of Cadwalan's treachery.

pas tidende men brohten?
to Adwine kinge.
and he iwrædabolgen?
wunder ane swide.
swa bið a bar wilde?
þenne he bit in holte.
bistonden mid hunden? (30317-30323)

(These tidings men brought to Edwin the king, and he was incensed wondrously much, as is a wild boar, when he is in the wood surrounded by hounds.)

Similarly, Edwin's wrath moves him to battle speeches exceeded only by Arthur's for their sense of exhilaration.

Wurde for niding þe mon?
þe nule hie sturien.
habben bares heorte?
and remes brede.
cuden þan kinge?
þat we quiken funde. (30389-30394)

(Be the man accounted for nothing, that will not him stir; have boars heart, and ravens' cunning, to teach the king that we are alive.)

The speech like the simile makes effective use of nature imagery.

Aside from his similarity to Arthur, Edwin's situation is also oddly reminiscent of Vortigern, the British king who is beguiled by a Saxon maiden, for the Saxon king is eventually destroyed because he becomes enamoured of a British maiden, Brian's sister, Galarne. Layamon makes it clear that in this case it is the British who practise evil counsel when they send "spies" to the king's host who:

... seiden tidende;
 Edwine kinge.
 wa worde heom forþon;
 þat heo iboren weore.
 sazen heo hi sæiden;
 of ane mæidenne... . (30467-30472)

(said tidings to Edwine the king,--woe worth them
 therefore, that they ever were born! --sayings
 they said to him of a maiden . . .)

The maiden proves to be the king's downfall because it is through her that Brian is able to kill Pelluz, Edwin's chief counsellor and prophet. Layamon, obviously, felt a compelling attraction to the legendary prophet; Pelluz is a marvellous figure who knows the history of the wind and of the moon; who knows where the fish swam and where the worms crept. (30498-30501) He is cast in the same mold as Merlin except that his skill in prophecy is much more directly useful in gaining military victory. His murderer, Brian, is one of the strangest creations in the poem. His devotion to Cadwalan is so extreme as to be almost a parody of the proper lord-retainer relationship. Following Geoffrey and Wace, Layamon relates the episode where the king demands deer meat and Brian, unable to find a deer, cuts out a piece of his own thigh and serves it up. But he exaggerates the grotesque element of the situation by making Brian pun on the word deer.

Hail seo þu Cadwadlan;
 þu ært mi kine-lauerd.
 ich habbe þe here i-broht;
 breðen alre deocest.
 þat ich auere an æl borde;
 beren biuoren kinge. (30586-30591)

(Hail be thou, Cadwalan, thou art my sovereign!
 I have brought thee here roast meat dearest of

all, that I ever on any board bare before king.)

In contrast to this deranged devotion to one king stands Brian's treachery toward Edwin. His adoption of disguise places him in the tradition of the six Pictish knights who poison Uther's well-water or of Appas, the Saxon, who murders Aurelius. In each case Layamon amplifies the process of disguise and stresses the evil deceit of those practising it. Brian's efforts, in fact, are the most complicated of all because he seems not to start out with a definite plan but rather to develop one as he goes along through a series of different disguises. He goes to London as a wine merchant, journeys secretly to York, changes clothes with a pilgrim, makes a special visit to a smith to equip the end of his staff with a sharp spike, and then on arriving at York undergoes an elaborate recognition scene with Galarne, who points out the prophet, Pelluz. Brian then kills Pelluz with his spiked staff and slips away in the confusion. As Madden says "the whole narrative is told by Layamon so differently from that in the French text, that we must suppose he had recourse to other materials, or drew largely on his imagination."²⁸ Such an extended account of British treachery wreaks havoc with any categorical view of the English author's racial sympathies.

A legitimate cavil over this account of Layamon's patriotism is that almost all the examples which show a shift in sympathy from the British to the Anglo-Saxon race are drawn from the very late stages of the poem. Certainly, the Britons are the heroes for the greater part of the poem

and they provide, under the leadership of Arthur, the standard against which all other heroic action must be measured. If the Brut reaches epic proportions it can only be in the Arthurian section, a question which will be pursued in subsequent chapters. Nevertheless, it is enlightening to attempt to trace the manner in which the author's attitudes evolve from Anglo-Saxon literary tradition. In all accounts of the legendary history the late stages after the departure of Arthur are comparatively weak and uninteresting. Layamon greatly enlivens this section, partly, as in the case of the Edwin-Cadwalan part, by amplifications which recall the Arthurian section, and partly by substituting for the waning nobility of the British race the new nobility of the Anglo-Saxons.

One character who is an exemplar of Saxon nobility and whose presence is given increased weight in the Brut is Athelstan. Madden comments that Layamon "certainly displays a remarkable ignorance of the Saxon annals, by bringing Athelstan into Britain in the seventh century, when he might have easily informed himself, that he did not ascend the throne till the year 924."²⁹ But if he betrays an ignorance of the historical facts yet he reveals an enthusiasm for Athelstan hardly exceeded by The Battle of Brunanburg. He is probably drawing on popular folklore in his description of that king.³⁰ The following account is a complete departure from the French text.

. . . hu Adelstan her com liden?
ut of Sex-londen.

and hu he al Angle-lond;
 sette on his aȝere hond.
 and hu he sette moting;
 and hu he sette husting.
 and hu he sette sciren;
 and makede frið of deoren.
 and hu he sette halimot;
 and hu he sette hundred.
 and þa nomen of þan tunen;
 on Sexisce runen.
 and ȝilden he gon rere;
 mucle and swide mære.
 and þa chirchen he gon dihten;
 after Sexisce irihten. (31989-32004)

(. . . how Athelstan here arrived out of Saxland,
 and how he set all England in his own hand; and
 how he set mooting, and how he set husting,
 and how he set shires, and made chaces of deer;
 and how he set halimot, and how he set hundred and
 the names of the towns in Saxish speech; and how
 he gan rear guilds, great and very ample, and the
 churches he gan make, after the Saxish manner . . .)

What is remarkable about this passage is not so much the character of Athelstan, though that is glorified by implication, but the list of English customs. The list amounts to a brief survey of Anglo-Saxon culture, and adjectives such as mucle and swide mære testify to Layamon's fondness for that culture. Cadwallader, exiled in Brittany, is a remote figure. Athelstan's reign symbolizes the establishment of a new order in Britain.

It would seem, then, that one of the major considerations which has motivated Layamon to undertake the work is pride in his own country. This pride enriches the narrative in many ways. The most important technical device is probably the rich store of images drawn from the native English landscape. It is undoubtedly Layamon's keen eye for nature which infuses his epic similes with such vitality. And

nature descriptions often work to give an increased sense of setting in the narrative, adding to the impact of the poem. Consider, for example, the description of Kærleon-on-Usk at Whitsunday, "when Easter was gone, and summer come to town" (24241-42).

Medewes þer weoren brader
 bihalues þere burhge,
 þer wes fiscr þer wes fugelr
 and fæiernes inoƷe,
 þer wes wude and wilde deor
 wunder ane monie. (24263-24268)

(Meadows there were broad, beside the burgh;
 there was fish, there was fowl, and fairness
 enow; there was wood and wild deer, wondrous
 many.)

The fairness of the landscape makes it a fit setting for Arthur's plenary court although a narrative comment a few lines later suggests that the description is not drawn solely from nature--"some books say certainly that the burgh was bewitched" and as Madden notes "it would be curious to ascertain what books these were."³¹

Layamon's pride in native resources allows him to borrow freely from the folklore and legendary material of popular traditions and such borrowings enlarge the narrative with a lively verisimilitude. A curious example is the story of the heathen man who approaches Gurmund and proposes to devise a strategy whereby Kinric may be taken at Cirencester. In summary, the method involves capturing sparrows and using them to transport fire inside the castle. During the conflagration Kinric escapes rather ignominiously by creeping out of the castle on his hands and knees. The

whole episode has many qualities of folktale.

Another example is drawn not so much from folktale as from folk custom. When preparations are being made for Arthur's Irish campaign, there are glimpses not only of the larger preparations made by the leaders of the army but also of the preparations which must be made by the common soldier.

sum scaeft horn sum scaft ban?
sum yarked stelene flan.
sum makede wonges?
gode and swide strong.
summe beouweden speren?
and beonneden sceldes. (22293-22298)

(Some shaped horn; some shaped bone; some prepared steel darts; some made thongs, good and very strong; some bent spears, and made ready shields.)

This glimpse of the functions of the different orders of society helps to create in the Brut what may be termed a sense of epic depth.

Layamon's awareness of the total society is further illustrated by his sympathy for the common man. When famine and plague strike the people he depicts their misery in an image charged with sorrow.

bat quale com on orue?
unimete swide.
per cheorl draf his sulge?
i-oxned swide fæire.
oder while he brohte ham?
halue his oxen.
oder brohte enne?
þe oder no brohte nenne. (31809-31816)

(the murrain came on cattle, exceeding much, where the churl drove his plow, oxened most fair, other while he brought home only half his oxen; the one brought one, the other brought none . . .)

Because of this comprehensive view of society, Layamon may

truly be called the spokesman of his country. The breadth of his view surpasses the limited intention of Geoffrey to give a history of kings; it extends the more narrow purpose of Wace to describe courtly life.

The result is that the Brut more nearly represents the consciousness of a people. In this regard it is epic. Insofar as the heroic element is expanded in the Brut and history is shaped by heroic actions it is epic. Thus, Layamon's attitude toward his work must be defined as epic in feeling although, as was pointed out early in this chapter, there exists a certain tension between the desire to record the facts of history accurately and the desire to embellish those facts with epic significance. Layamon is a scribe who follows the pattern of authoritative books but he is also a poet who celebrates the deeds of a noble ancestry. The tension is expressed in other ways as well. While essentially following the nationalistic chronicle tradition, Layamon adds various details which infuse the narrative with a sense of eschatological significance. This re-creation of the past is vibrant with meaning for a late twelfth or early thirteenth century audience--the past helps to define the present. Furthermore, the nationalistic fervor, the ecclesiastical sense of universality, and the awareness of the composite nature of English ancestry--British plus Anglo-Saxon--combine to form Layamon's complex sense of patriotism. It is a patriotism of the righteous and the noble rather than of the Briton or the Saxon. Hence the Brut is something more than a history; it participates in at least some of the norms of epic.

III. THE HERO

Another development related to Layamon's sense of patriotism is the aggrandizement of national heroes. This process takes effect as Layamon reworks much of his source material in dramatic form. As C.S. Lewis claims, "the Brut might have been written by one who had learned from Aristotle that the narrative poet should speak as little as possible in his own person."¹ It is this innovation which first moves Layamon away from history toward epic. The pure narrative, the mere recording of events, is essentially an historical vision, while the creation of dialogue and the dramatic expansion of action is an imaginative or literary vision. A characteristic feature of the epic genre is that characters reveal themselves not only through actions but through public speeches, soliloquies, and prayers. In other words, the author must not only record what the characters did but also imagine what, under the circumstances, they said or thought. In terms of form, the chronicle tradition attempts to define a society by plotting the course of its entire history; it employs an annalistic method which endeavors to be all inclusive by showing the continuous development of a society from its beginnings to the present. It makes only minimal formal demands because its basic structure depends on chronological order. Epic strives for the same sense of expansiveness, or sweeping outlook as the chronicle, but it does so through intensification,

it develops a sense of proportion or a unified structure by compressing the narrative around a single, central, symbolic character or action to which accrues a totality of meaning so that the epic stands for a people, a nation, or an era. The figure of the hero is therefore essential to the epic genre.

Several books have been written which attempt to describe the general nature of the epic hero but they are all more or less in agreement that he descends from the mythic hero. Northrop Frye, for example, argues that the epic hero is a character from high mimetic fiction which follows, logically and chronologically, the category of myth.² Sir Maurice Bowra, too, suggests that in pre-heroic poetry the emphasis is on magic, and the protagonist is usually a shaman or magician.³ The mythic component of the hero's makeup accounts for certain of the more notable properties of epic, especially divine interest in the progress of the hero and an intense fascination with ritual forms of expression. It would seem that what is sometimes called "the apparatus of the gods" in epic can be at least partially attributed to the fact that the hero is either a direct descendant of a god, or gods, or was at one time worshipped as a god himself. Jan de Vries insists that ". . . the epic is rooted in a cult."⁴ He defines "myth" as the story of a hero's life, whereas "rite" is the acting out or visual illustration of that life. The rite or cult developed prior in time to the myth which probably increased

and expanded when the cult as an active form of religion began to decline and it became necessary to explain, in words, certain obscurities of the religious ritual. In other words, in early forms of cultural expression, ritual always starts out with an explicitly religious significance and although in epic it is often retained under this rubric it also extends into broader forms of ceremony or scenes of highly mannered human behavior.

However, despite his quasi-divine nature and his special relationship to other divine beings, the most important characteristic of the epic hero centers on his humanity. The hero differs from other men not in kind but in the degree of his power. Thomas Greene offers a valuable discrimination:

Epic awe, as distinguished from religious or mythic awe, springs from the realization that a man can commit an extraordinary act while still remaining limited. It does not matter that, in practise, the poet occasionally describes heroic action which is beyond human powers, if the hero is understood to be subject to ignorance or foolhardiness and above all to death. The most important recognition scenes in epic are not between two people but between the hero and his mortality.⁵

Epic awe, therefore, is essentially humanistic; the epic explores the limitations of human capabilities. The distinction between epic and mythic awe is especially pertinent to Layamon because he is working with material which purports to be historical and therefore no matter how much he magnifies his heroes they tend to retain their humanity. In addition, as a medieval priest, he can hardly elevate mere humans to the stature of divinity. The Chadwicks in the first volume of The Growth of Literature make a

relevant observation:

The British heroes, being Christians, did not become demigods but they seem to have been regarded as superior, at least in size, to people of later times.⁶

Here the concept of the preeminence of a past age, the heroic age, is added to the concept of the gifted mortal. Like the Welsh heroic tales examined by the Chadwicks, like Beowulf, and in fact, like the Iliad, Layamon's Brut is a vision of the remote past, a time when men were awesome.

One of the obvious ways in which the Brut does not meet the requirements of epic is that the poem is not centered on one heroic figure on whose actions depends the fate of the nation; instead there is a series of heroic figures. As Dorothy Everett remarks, Layamon does not seem able to present a complete epic hero.⁷ But the fascinating thing is that he nearly does. Increasingly throughout the narrative, one can see Layamon developing an interest in the figure of the hero and employing more and more heroic conventions to amplify his narrative. It is hardly possible, perhaps not even desirable, to say anything new and original about the nature of the hero, but, in addition to the general characteristics noted above as to his origin and stature, there is a certain well established pattern for the heroic life.⁸ It is worthwhile to summarize briefly this pattern in general terms to facilitate the particular study of the heroes in the Brut.

The predominant features include unusual circumstances surrounding the conception and birth of the hero. Often

the mother is a virgin, as in the case of Danae, Alcmena, or even the Virgin Mary, and the father is a god. Sometimes the hero's birth occasions a prophecy which foretells something extraordinary for him--for example, the forewarnings of doom which accompany the birth of Oedipus or of Paris. As a result, the hero's youth is often threatened and he requires the protection and counsel of an older and wiser person. During his upbringing the hero once again deviates from what is normal: he either betrays his prowess at a very early age or is remarkably slow in his development. Beowulf, for example, appears to have given little hint of his capabilities until his youth was well advanced. In some cases the hero acquires invulnerability. Achilles is the classic example, but there are others such as the Germanic hero Siegfried who by bathing in the hot blood of a dragon made himself invincible except where a broad linden leaf fell between his shoulder blades.⁹ Ultimately, the hero is tested and here there are manifold variations all of which allow the hero to demonstrate some combination of strength, courage, and intelligence. Sometimes the hero conquers chaos, symbolized perhaps by a dragon or monster, something outside the pale of human and even divine order; sometimes he excels in qualities of leadership, founding a nation or overcoming civil strife. Finally, the hero typically dies a glorious death, manifesting even in death the capabilities of human life at its best.

Admittedly, the presence of a hero in a narrative does

not automatically make it an epic, but if the character of a hero is strong enough he tends to attract peripheral characters and incidents into the sphere of his influence so that his actions take on a communal or national significance which is sometimes called epic. For this reason it is enlightening to study closely three sections in the Brut which are remarkable for their being dominated by a hero: the Brutus section (ll. 73-2094), the Belin-Brennes section (ll. 4288-6090), and the Arthur section (ll. 12800-28672). These three portions are spaced at rather lengthy intervals through the poem. Study of these passages in the order in which they appear reveals the development of Layamon's art. He is increasingly fascinated by questions surrounding heroic action and he becomes increasingly skillful at handling the conventions related to the hero.

The first part of the Brut is dominated, of course, by the figure of Brutus and most of the epic material is already present in Layamon's sources. For example, the basic structure of the plot--the freeing of the Trojan people, the journey to a promised land, the difficulties encountered en route, and the founding of the British nation--is very similar to the plot of the Aeneid and also reminiscent of the story of Moses. So, too, the character of Brutus is modelled after the pattern of a heroic life. His noble ancestry is certified because he descends directly from Aeneas who is his great-grandfather on his father's side. Like many another hero's, his birth is shrouded in mystery.

Silvius, his father, secretly loves a maiden, Lavinia's niece, and when Ascanius discovers the fact he orders his soothsayers to tell what sort of child the woman has in her womb. They foretell a boy who will cause the death of both his father and mother, who will wander in exile for many years, and who will eventually rise to the highest honour. The main outline of this prediction is found not only in Geoffrey of Monmouth¹⁰ but also in Nennius' Historia Brittonum.¹¹ Brutus, of course, grows up to fulfill the prophecy.

Another prophecy, one which deals more explicitly with the heroic part of Brutus' life, occurs when he and his Trojans find the temple of Diana on the island of LEOGETIA. The goddess directs them to Britain, the Celtic paradisaical island in the west. Her supervision of the founding of Britain provides the narrative with the same sense of national destiny divinely ordained as is shown in classical epic. The whole incident is handled in all versions of the legendary history with a ritualistic solemnity appropriate to the occasion. Geoffrey seems to derive some of his material from Celtic heroic poetry, especially when he makes Brutus lie on the skin of a hind stretched before the altar of Diana. In The Dream of Rhonabwy, Rhonabwy must lie on a yellow ox skin before he can be granted a vision.¹²

In Layamon the episode retains basically the same structure except that the element of ritual is amplified, even though the medieval priest has some hesitation about

accepting Diana's divinity. The English Brut adds details to the description of the entry into the temple; the vessel Brutus carries is all of red gold and the libation it contains is partly milk of a white hind that Brutus shot with his own hand. In Celtic mythology the white hind had otherworld associations but it is probably introduced here as the sacrifice appropriate to the virgin goddess, Diana. The emphasis on Brutus' hunting ability also makes the choice of the huntress Diana as his tutelary deity particularly suitable. Layamon expands the interaction between the hero and the goddess:

He clepede to pere leuedi;
 heo wes him on heorten leof.
 mid milden his worden;
 he girnde hire mihten.
 ofte he custe þat weofed;
 mid winsume lates.
 he halde þa milc in þat fur;
 mid milden his worden.
 Leafdi Diana! leoue Diana!
 hege Diana! help me to neode.
 wise me and witeres;
 þurh þine wihtful craft.
 whuder ich mæilidan;
 and ledan mine leoden. (1190-1206)

(He called to the lady, she was to him beloved in heart; with mild words he entreated her might. Oft he kissed the altar with winsome looks; he poured the milk on the fire, with his mild words: "Lady Diana! loved Diana! high Diana, help me in need! Teach me and counsel through thy wise craft, whither I may go and lead my people . . .")

The repetition of the name of the goddess gives the passage the quality of a chant, an impression strengthened by the alliterative form of the poetry, which heightens the liturgical mood. Further, the familiar form of address and the choice of adjectives which precede the name create a sense of

personal intimacy between the goddess and the hero.

Layamon further stresses the intimate relationship when he describes the first part of Brutus' vision.

þa þuhte him on his swefne;
 þar he on slepe læi.
 þa his lauedi Dīana;
 hine leofliche biheolde,
 mid winsume leahtren;
 wel heo him be-hihte,
 and hendiliche hire hond;
 on his heued leide.
 and þus him to seide;
 þer he on slepe lai. (1222-1231)

(Then seemed it to him in his dream, where he asleep lay, that his lady Diana beheld him lovingly with winsome smiles, well she him promised, and courteously laid her hand on his head, and thus to him said, where he asleep lay . . .)

The imaginative amplification of this relationship can be seen in the contrast to Geoffrey's unadorned statement that "the goddess stood before him and spoke these words to him. . . ."13 Images such as Diana's winsome smiles and the physical contact of her hand on his head give the passage a remarkable similarity to Homer's description of a meeting between Odysseus and Athena when he finally lands in Ithaca. Odysseus has just finished fabricating an account of who he is and how he has arrived.

The bright-eyed goddess smiled at Odysseus's tale and caressed him with her hand. Her appearance altered, and now she looked like a woman, tall, beautiful, and accomplished. And when she replied to him she abandoned her reserve.¹⁴

Although it is unlikely that Layamon had direct knowledge of The Odyssey, the striking parallels between these two scenes suggest immediately that the relationship between Brutus and Diana is more analogous to that between Odysseus and

Athena than to the one between Aeneas and Venus, for example. One cannot rule out the possibility of indirect Greek influence on the English writer but a more likely interpretation is simply that Layamon holds the same concept as Homer that an epic hero is one favored by a divine being.

As well as signifying the importance of beginnings by invoking divine sanctions for an undertaking, ritual action is also a means of showing appreciation to the gods for victory or success. Here, too, Layamon shows a tendency to embellish his sources. When Brutus and his people arrive safely in Britain they celebrate with meat and drink, with a show of silver and gold, with horses and fine clothing, and with merry songs. During this celebration Corineus, one of the most stalwart champions accompanying Brutus, fights with Geomagog, a giant. While most of the details of this episode are present in Geoffrey and Wace, Layamon adds the significant epithet that Geomagog is "godes widersaka"--God's adversary--(1808) and when the giant is thrown over the cliff he adds the comment that "the mighty wretch went to hell." Both of these details seem to recall passages in Beowulf where Grendel is called "godes andsaca"--God's adversary--(786 and 1682) and is said to be "received in hell" (852). Layamon thus emphasizes the righteousness of the Trojans' claim to Britain, and both the epithet and the comment are proof of divine sanction.

Except for this one glimpse of a native English tradition, it is apparent that most of the amplifications of the Brutus section have distinct classical parallels.

Brutus' noble ancestry, his involvement with fatal prophecy, his leadership qualities, his careful regard for proper ceremony, and his special relationship with a divine protectress are handled in a manner which suggests classical influence. It is obvious that Brutus, more than any other hero in the poem, is directly related to the heroes of Greece and Rome and it is therefore not unnatural that motifs deriving from antiquity should cluster around him. Certainly, by comparison with the Belin-Brennes section where Layamon's additions are more numerous, the Brutus section is notably lacking in additions of a strongly Germanic character.

Nearly all of the material Layamon employs in the aggrandizement of the heroes Belin and Brennes is Germanic. A word of advice offered by Alistair Campbell in "The Old English Epic Style" is not out of place here.

. . . all who seek to find Indo-European origins for things Germanic should, in each case, weigh the alternative possibility of independent native development with hints from classical sources.¹⁵

It is not surprising that in the Belin-Brennes section Layamon's additions, drawn from native resources, are more prolific and are used with more finesse. Especially prominent are traditions arising out of the Anglo-Saxon heroic code.

As usual, the Brut gives an expanded version of treachery with many dramatic additions. In this case the traitor who first counsels evil to Brennes is appropriately named Malgod, and is explicitly said to be "anne hird cniht"

(4316) (a hearth-retainer). His function in this capacity should be to further the welfare of the community rather than to pursue selfish ends. Although Dorothy Everett points out that the meaning of words from Old English heroic poetry is dimmed and only vaguely understood by Layamon,¹⁶ in this section he seems to play consciously on the word "hired" and its various compound forms. Malgode is "anne hird-cniht" who is active in the party that meditated mischief; he upbraids Brennes for concealing his thoughts from "þine hired-monnen," and Brennes rejoices to hear the counsel of his "hirde-manne." Madden translates the compounds as household men or household knights and the word "hired" by itself as domestic. Certainly, in the later manuscript (BM Cotton Otho C. XIII) the meaning is vague and only dimly understood because the compounds are invariably reduced to "cniht," and "hired" becomes "menne." However, it seems that originally Layamon had something more precise in mind because like the old comitatus these men are responsible for the honour of their lord. They are emphatically denounced because through their corrupt counsel they have marred the dignity of Brennes.

Layamon makes it clear that he believes loyalty between brothers should be sacrosanct. Before the outbreak of sedition the brothers rule the land together for five years in concord and fellowship. The situation stands thus until men with wicked crafts advise Brennes to break covenant with his brother. On hearing this, Belin's first reaction is to protest against the wrong done to kinship.

Wa wurpe a þon broðer
þe biswiked þene oder. (4452-53)

(Woe worth ever the brother who betrayeth the other!)

Brennes's grossest act of treachery is to invite and to lead foreign powers against his own country; the split between the brothers reaches a nadir when

Brennes wes in Norwæye;
Belin in þisse londe. (4440-41)

(Brennes was in Norway, Belin in this land.)

Here the balance of the alliterative line deftly marks the division in the family as well as the division in the country.

Obviously, Brennes' crimes are not only political against his country but personal against his brother. In addition, he commits crimes against the course of true love. In one of the most curious expansions in the Brut, Layamon adds nearly one hundred and fifty lines to Wace's narrative by elaborating a love triangle. Geoffrey and Wace simply relate that when Brennes married the Norwegian king's daughter he incurred the enmity of the king of Denmark who happened to love the same woman. Layamon provides the woman with a name, Delgan, and has her send a ring and a letter to Godlac, the Danish king, protesting that she is being married against her will. The letter is really quite touching; it expresses her love and her sense of loss at the same time. Godlac's reaction is suitably drastic--he swoons on his throne and his men have to revive him by throwing cold well water in his face. The love triangle has no appreciable effect on the course of the narrative and it must be admitted that in this one instance at least Layamon's additions appear to

be drawn from the sphere of romance rather than from epic tradition. The letter and the accompanying ring are typical motifs from courtly love poetry.

Another woman, Tonuene, the mother of the two brothers, is introduced into the narrative in a more epic vein, for her actions are politically significant. When Brennes, after prospering in Normandy, returns once more to attempt to conquer Britain with foreign aid, she ventures out on the battlefield alone before the battle to plead with him to avoid the conflict. She argues both from the devastation which would follow foreign invasion and from the wrong he would do to his kindred. She approaches Brennes just after he has armed himself (in contrast, she herself is dressed in tattered clothes) and implores him to remember the breasts he had sucked and the womb which had borne him. Layamon's description of Brennes' reaction to this appeal is masterly; it shows him capable of molding heroic conventions to his own purpose.

Brennes þat isæh
and sorȝedon on his heorte.
let cliden his gare;
þat hit grunde sohte.
he scæth his riche sceld;
feor ut in þene feld.
awei he warp his gode breond;
and of mid þere burne. (5077-5084)

(Brennes saw that, and sorrowed in his heart;
he let his spear glide, so that it sought the
ground; he cast his rich shield far out in the
field; away he threw his good brand, and off with
the coat-of-mail.)

The scene is similar to the heroic convention of the arming of the hero except that it is employed in reverse. In this

way the effect is reminiscent of the scene in The Dream of the Rood where Christ disrobes before mounting the cross.¹⁷ By employing a heroic convention in an atypical fashion Layamon is able to demonstrate that there is a certain heroic quality in acts of peace as well as in acts of war.

Belin and Brennes seal their pledge of brotherhood by undertaking the conquest of Rome together. Layamon continues the theme of loyalty and justifies the undertaking by inserting the detail that they went to Rome to avenge Remus, whom Romulus, his brother, had murdered in Rome many years before. Of course, another facet of the expedition is simply the glory of foreign conquest, especially of Rome. That the conquest of Rome serves to inflate the prowess of the heroes is demonstrated in the Brut by an elaborated account of the hidden treasures of the city.

Biwunnen heo Rome;
 þe riche burh wel idone.
 þer heo funden muchel gold;
 and garsume unimete.
 Heo unbunde þa locun;
 drowen ut þa baiȝes.
 þa palleš and þa purpres;
 þe iworht weoren in Puille.
 alle þe maðmes;
 þe weoren monie kunnes.
 þer wes moni wrehte;
 sone iworden riche. (5921-5933)

(They won Rome, the rich burgh and strong; there they found much gold and measureless treasure. They unbound the locks, drew out the jewels, the palls and the purples, that were wrought in Apulia; all the riches that were of many kinds. There was many a poor man soon become rich.)

In Anglo-Saxon literature one has only to read Beowulf to understand the importance of treasure as a measure of the

hero's stature.¹⁸ The brothers put it to good use too, causing halls and towers to be repaired, walls to be strengthened and chambers to be built. Further, it is this wealth which enables the kings to fulfill their function as lawgivers. Brennes promises the Romans to enforce the same laws that stood in the days of their elders, while Belin returns to Britain to establish laws strong and good. It is appropriate that these kings by the end of their respective reigns should have gained a reputation as lawgivers because their father, Dunwale, is reputed to have established the Molmutine laws which Geoffrey says "are still famous today among the English."¹⁹

If Layamon demonstrates a very Germanic attitude toward the treasure of Rome, his descriptions of the battles and the battle prowess necessary to capture that treasure are even more strongly in the tradition of heroic poetry. Prowess of a sort is certainly imperative because the Britons are confronted by, and employ, a surprising array of battle techniques as Layamon diverges in this part of the poem a great deal from the French text in presenting numerous tactical innovations. More important, however, to the theme of epic convention is the essential spirit of the Roman siege. During the heat of battle Belin and Brennes utter a speech which expresses the heroic code in terms very similar to the speech of the old warrior Byrhtwold in The Battle of Maldon.²⁰

3if we hennen fared þus:
 alle heo wulled æfter us.
 and 3if it swa ilumpped:
 þa we ham cumen liden.

heorten we haueden sare;
 and ure cun ædwit auere mare.
 Ah go we heon on mid sweorde;
 for al heo beoð forlorne.
 wreke we mid manscipe;
 ure wine-mæies.
 for leouere us is herer
 mid manscipe to fallen.
 þanne we heonne i-sunde farren;
 ure frenden to scare. (5822-5835)

(If we hence fare thus, they all will pursue after us; and if it so befalleth, that we arrive home, we shall have sore hearts, and our kin reproach evermore. But go we on them with sword, for all they shall be destroyed, and wreak we our kindred! For liefer it is to us to fall here with honor, than that we hence go in safety, to the disgrace of our friends.)

The preference for honor, even in death, over disgrace in safety is a typically heroic sentiment.²¹ It is pride in this code which pushes the brothers on and eventually brings them victory.

However, there is also, in the character of these two heroes, a hint of the classical concept of hubris; or, perhaps, since they are basically Anglo-Saxon heroes, one might charge them with the same flaw attributed to Byrhtnoth--ofermod (overweening pride).²² While they live, Belin and Brennes are strong enough to maintain their honor but at their death there are ominous signs that the British people will suffer repercussions as a result of their valor. On the death of Brennes, Layamon interjects that the Roman people were glad of it, and on the death of Belin they promise retribution.

While he dude us tuone.
 nu is þe kinge iburied;
 wrake we us on Bruttes.
 and in to þan londen we sullen faren;

bringen þer sorwen and kare. (6013-6017)

(Whilom he did us grief! Now is the king buried,
wreak we us on the Britons, and into the land we
shall go, bring there sorrow and care!)

Belin and Brennes thus create the sense of accomplishing more than ordinary men and of leaving a gap at their death which cannot be filled by ordinary men. This sense of the brightness of a heroic life surrounded by the chaotic forces of darkness is a characteristic epic feature. A hero extends the frontiers of experience by showing what man is capable of at his best, but the feat does not often bring happiness.

The Belin-Brennes section does communicate an epic sense of the universe ordered by human will although the role of hero is shared by two characters. Brennes, the rebel, is a much more interesting figure during the early part, but after their reconciliation the two brothers become hardly distinguishable, each participating in the same action and even delivering speeches in unison, though probably this is to be understood simply as a convention employed by Layamon to indicate that both are in agreement with what is being said. Throughout this section Layamon repeatedly draws on the heroic conventions of his native literature in order to amplify and elaborate his narrative. As has been shown, the section is replenished with such motifs as the duty of the comitatus, the arming (or disarming) of the hero, the Germanic feeling for treasure, the heroic notion of better-death-than-disgrace, and the tragic flaw of ofermod. However, although each of these conventions

provides interesting and nicely handled moments in the narrative, none is developed to any great length. Like many other parts of the Brut this section has a sort of piece-meal quality about it. In fact, it might be argued that the character of either Belin or Brennes is little more than a series of such conventions; neither hero really deserves to be called a full bodied character. Neither is as well known as Arthur, and rightly so.

Arthur is already the predominant figure in the legendary history by the time Layamon reworks the narrative, and many of Layamon's most important and unique additions are connected directly with the character of Arthur. Geoffrey of Monmouth cites Arthur in his dedication as a representative or symbol of all the kings of Britain. The Brut develops this propensity further to the point where he is not simply the representative of all other kings but a symbol of the national character. In creating such a hero Layamon is following, consciously or unconsciously, the footsteps of one of the greatest epic authors. C.M. Bowra comments on Virgil and the ideal of Rome.

The fundamental theme of the Aeneid is the destiny of Rome as it was revealed in this mythical dawn of history before Rome itself existed. This destiny is presented in the person of Aeneas who not only struggles and suffers for the Rome that is to be but is already a typical Roman. If his individual fortune is subordinate to the fortune of Rome, his character shows what Romans are.²³

Similarly, the character of Arthur shows what Britons are; he becomes the embodiment of a British ideal. In the Brut, in many important ways, Arthur is Britain.

The way in which this comes about is a complex process. What is here called the Arthur section actually includes a great deal of matter which occurs before the birth of the hero, but his influence is felt long before his birth because of the many prophecies about him, because Aurelius, Uther and Merlin prefigure him, and because the Saxon invasion sets the stage for Arthur's heroism. The arrival of Hengest and Horsa and the foolishness of Vortigern constitute a well known story among the British people; it is recorded by Gildas, Bede, and Nennius, as well as by later chroniclers. According to Lascelles Abercrombie, the epic poet works by symbolizing

. . . the accepted unconscious metaphysic of his age. To do this, he takes some great story which has been absorbed into the prevailing consciousness of his people. As a rule, though not quite invariably, the story will be of things which are, or seem, so far back in the past, that anything may credibly happen in it; so imagination has its freedom, and so significance is displayed. But quite invariably, the materials of the story will have an unmistakeable air of actuality; that is they come profoundly out of human experience, whether they declare legendary heroism as in Homer or Virgil, or myth as in Beowulf and Paradise Lost, or actual history, as in Lucan and Camoens and Tasso.²⁴

Abercrombie's description exactly fits the materials of the story at the time Layamon is writing. The story is well known--"part of the prevailing consciousness of his people." In fact, Geoffrey of Monmouth claims, in the dedication to his work written ca. 1136, that:

. . . these deeds were handed joyfully down in oral tradition, just as if they had been committed to writing, by many peoples who had only their memory to rely on.²⁵

The story of the Saxon invasion gives the narrative an air of historical actuality while the shadowy, legendary character of Arthur allows the imagination its freedom.

When Arthur's grandfather, Constantine II, arrives in Britain, British forces are at a low ebb because of the depletion of the soldiery which took place under Maximian. The people appeal in desperation to Amorican Britain for a new leader. Constantine is able to reinvigorate the nation and drive out the Picts and Scots but the British comfort in Constantine is short lived because he is soon assassinated. Constantine provides Britain with the seeds of future glory in the form of his sons, Aurelius and Uther, and especially his grandson, Arthur. However, his death also marks the inception of future disaster owing to the dispute over the succession to his throne and also owing to the dangerous power it places in the hands of the infamous Vortigern.

Layamon expands the contrast between the weakness and treachery of Constans, Constantine's eldest son, and Vortigern and the valor and righteousness of Arthur. Although Constans has taken monastic vows he is easily persuaded to throw off his monk's habit. At this point, the narrative is greatly elaborated by Layamon. Vortigern sends Constans secretly away from the monastery, remains himself talking to a swain in a monk's habit disguised as Constans, and when the abbot discovers the falsehood, threatens to kill him and finally bribes him with twenty ploughlands. The iniquitous way in which Constans comes to the throne stands in marked contrast

to the indisputable right to the throne of Arthur, who is equally youthful. Constans, being no match for the cunning Vortigern, is shortly assassinated. Vortigern then becomes king; he is a model, especially in Layamon, of everything that a king ought not to be. He is notorious for allowing the infiltration of the Saxons and for favoring Saxons over the Britons whom he rules. Layamon heightens the contrast between a king who provides for his people and one who does not by adding that the swains of Hengest were better clothed and fed than Vortigern's thanes and for this Vortigern's court is held in contempt. By contrast, Arthur is a model of what a king should be to his people.

pa þe Ardur wes king;
 hærne nu seollic þing.
 he wes mete-custi;
 ælche quike monne.
 cniht mid þan be3ste;
 wunder ane kene.
 he wes þan 3ungen for fader;
 þan alden for frouer.
 and wið þan unwise;
 wunder ane sturnne.
 woh him wes wunder lad;
 and þat rihte a leof. (19930-19941)

(When Arthur was king,--hearken now a marvellous thing;--he was liberal to each man alive, knight with the best, wondrously keen! He was to the young for father, to the old for comforter, and with the unwise wonderfully stern; wrong was to him exceeding loathsome, and the right ever dear.)

Wace also recites the virtues of Arthur but the emphasis falls on the idea that he was "mult ama preis" (one of Love's lovers) who "servir se fist curteisement/ Si ce cuntint mult noblement" (ordained the courtesies of the courts, and observed high state in a very splendid fashion)

(11. 9025-9028).²⁶ Layamon's more practical concern regarding the duties of a king with respect to his people reveals a broader view of society. In addition, Layamon consistently seems to hold up Arthur's rectitude as the obverse of the inferior kings who precede him.

Not all of Arthur's forerunners, of course, are inferior. Aurelius illustrates the well-tempered seriousness of a good king and Uther, especially, has many striking characteristics which he bequeaths to his son. Uther's nature is passionate and exultant. His speeches, filled with mocking irony directed towards his enemies, are matched only by Arthur's speeches in that part of the poem where the long similes occur.²⁷ For example, when Uther, despite a severe illness, insists on conducting a battle against the Saxons, Octa, the Saxon leader, ridicules him as a lame man who will fight with crutches. On the defeat of the Saxons Uther proclaims, with heavy sarcasm,

. . . nu haueð þeos dede kingr
þas quiken aqualden. (19602-19603)

(. . . now this dead king hath killed these quick.)

The same ironic structure is seen in the imagery of Uther's boast before killing Pascent and his exulting words after:

Passent þu scalt abidenr
her cuned Uðer riden.
He smat hine uenen þat hæuedr
þat he adun halde.
and þat sweord putte in his mudr
swulc mete him wes uncudr.
þat þe ord of þan sworde
wod in pere eorde.
þa seide Utherr
Passent lið nu þer.
nu þu hauest Brutlondr
al bi-tald to þire hond. (18088-18099)

("Pascent, thou shalt abide; here cometh Uther riding!" He smote him upon the head, so that he fell down, and the sword put in his mouth--such meat was to him strange,--so that the point of the sword went in the earth. Then said Uther: "Pascent, lie now there; now thou hast Britain all won to thy hand!")

Such emotional ferocity is typical of the attitude Layamon's heroes display toward an enemy.²⁸ The narrative interjection at line 18093, "swulc mete him wes uncud" suggests that Layamon fully approves of, and participates in, the attitude himself. J.S.P. Tatlock is probably right in calling it his "... most intense and personal trait."²⁹

The same use of deliberate rhetorical antithesis occurs when Arthur apostrophizes the dead bodies of Colgrim and Baldulf.

Lien nu pere Colgrim;
 þu were iclumben hæge.
 and Baldulf þi broðer;
 lid bi pere side.
 nu ich al þis kine-lond;
 sette an eower ahære hond.
 dales and dunes;
 and al mi drihliche uolc.
 þu clumbe a pissen hulle;
 wunder ane hæge.
 swulc þu woldest to hæuene;
 nu þu scalt to hælle. (21432-21433)

("Lie now there, Colgrim; thou wert climbed high; and Baldulf, thy brother, lie by thy side; now set I all this kingdom in your own hands; dales and downs, and all my good folk! Thou climbed this hill wondrously high, as if thou wouldst ascend to heaven; now thou scalt to hell.)

Arthur might well have learned this speech from his father. The difference between the height Colgrim thought to reach and the depth to which he is sent, and the disparity between the amount of land he intended to possess and that which he

has in hand, marks the force of Arthur's disdain. By contrast, the Britons under Arthur make certain that words and deeds are one, to the extent that in line 20605, "and we heom sculled tellen/Bruttisc spellen" (and we shall tell them British tales), boasting becomes a metaphor for death dealing. This vaunting quality in Arthur's character, which has its closest parallels in the speeches of Uther, is a typical feature of the heroic warrior. Other medieval epics, too, employ the technique of antithesis. Roland makes good his boast in comparison to Ganelon who fails; a similar contrast exists between Beowulf and Unferth.

However, although Uther prefigures some important characteristics of Arthur, he does not fully possess that sense of self-mastery which enables the greater leader to shape his own destiny. Throughout the Arthur section an undercurrent of internal strife is present--indeed, four of the five kings preceding Arthur (the exception is Vortigern) are assassinated by people whom they mistakenly trust. It is not without difficulty that Arthur manages to maintain civil order. This is illustrated in one of the most lively dramatic expansions in the Brut--a scene which leads eventually to the founding of the Round Table. (The Round Table itself was introduced into the legend by Wace.) During a Yule day celebration in London a quarrel arises among the people because of pride; each esteems himself better than his companion. At first they throw loaves of bread, then silver, then bowls filled with wine and afterwards start fighting with fists and knives. Great slaughter ensues. Arthur

restores order and exacts a terrible punishment; the guilty party is given a disgraceful burial, all male kin are executed (forestalling the possibility of blood feuds), and all female kin are defaced by having their noses cut off (a damaging blow against the sin of pride and a serious impediment to having their beauty attract other male sympathisers). The extremity of the punishment illustrates the value Arthur places on civil order. Without doubt it is actions such as this which cause the British people to stand in fear and awe of Arthur. Layamon insists throughout on the absolute rectitude of his hero.

The epic hero, in fact, is often seen as an agent of justice; his moral probity is frequently ensured through associations with the supernatural. As a Christian, it is impossible for Layamon to introduce a pantheon of divine characters but he does insert the detail that at his birth Arthur is received by elves and endowed with magical gifts, and furthermore he is careful to show his hero as an agent of God's will. For example, before his fight with Frolle, Arthur spends the night in prayer or religious service.

In addition, Layamon exhibits an inclination to include or elaborate ritual action, that mode of behavior by which men keep in touch with divinity. Shortly after his coronation Arthur calls a great husting in London so that he may swear an oath before his people to avenge his father and uncles on the Saxons. He commands his knights to swear the same oath.

Up aræs Ardur:
 adelest kingen.
 and lette bringen him beforan:
 halidomes wel icoren.
 þer to gon cneoli:
 þe king sune þrie.
 nuste noht his duȝede:
 what he deme wolde.
 Ardur heold up his riht hond:
 ænne aȝ he þer swor: (19972-19981)

(up arose Arthur, noblest of kings, and caused
 to be brought before him reliques well choice;
 thereto the king gan soon to kneel thrice;--his
 people knew not what he would pronounce. Arthur
 held up his right hand, an oath there he swore . . .)

The use of relics, the ritual action of kneeling three times and holding up the right hand, the mystification of the retainers, all these invest the occasion with a ritual solemnity appropriate to the undertaking. The oath represents a combination of heroic boast and religious duty; it is a blend of pagan heroism and Christian piety. Nothing of this episode occurs in Wace. Layamon seems to want to communicate a sense of universal significance and he does so by resorting to a description of ritual formality, a typical epic feature.

Elsewhere, Arthur displays other connections with supernatural beings. His description of the hostile and weird setting at Loch Lomond is very reminiscent of the Beowulf-poet.

þat is a seolcud mere:
 iset a middelærde.
 mid fenne and mid ræode:
 mid watere swide bræde.
 mid fiscen and mid feozelen:
 mid uniuele þingen.
 þat water is unimete brade:
 nikeres þer badied inne.
 þer is æluene ploȝe:
 in atteliche pole. (21739-21748)

(That is a marvellous lake, set in middle-earth,
with fen, and with reed, with water exceeding
broad; with fish and with fowl, with evil things!
The water is immeasurably broad; nikers therein
bathe; there is play of elves in the hideous pool.)

The correspondence to Grendel's mere is so close as to suggest that the description is a native literary convention. Wace relates information about the sixty rivers and sixty islands but none of this specific imagery about fens, reeds, and nikers, nor the detail about elves. The imagery conveys not only the sense of a mysterious setting but also a ready willingness to attribute the mystery in nature to supernatural beings. Similarly, when Arthur describes another lake that he knows of, Wace, with his usual touch of skepticism, says: "Jo ne sai se huem l'enginna/U nature l'apareilla" (9553-54) (I cannot tell whether the pond was digged by the wit of man, or if Nature shaped it to her will). Layamon has Arthur say, in a matter of fact tone: "alfene hine dulfen" (21998) (elves dug it). Arthur's easy awareness of the connection between the mysterious in nature and supernatural beings suggests that he has powers not available to the ordinary mortal.

In fact, Arthur's close association with nature intimates that he represents the spirit of Britain, not only the people but the country itself. A curious similarity exists between Arthur and Merlin. Each has several characteristics of the typical hero: both are conceived under mysterious circumstances, both reveal their prowess at an early age, and both have an exultant, domineering nature. However, unlike the epic hero, neither of them seems to be subject to death. Of Arthur it is explicitly stated that he yet lives, while of Merlin

nothing is stated explicitly about his departure, nor is there ever any hint that he has died; he simply ceases after a certain point to take any active part in the narrative although his words continue to be cited long after. This fact tends to raise Arthur and Merlin above the level of mortality to the level of semi-mythic characters--symbols of Britain. For example, when messengers seek to find Merlin they ride north, south, east, and west before they find him in the west at "Alaban," a fair well or spring. It is obvious that the people consider him to be a sort of spirit of the land; they expect to find him almost anywhere. And when Uther desires his help to seduce Igerna his messenger has to travel to the west end of the land to find Merlin, standing under a tree, deep in a wilderness where he has dwelt many winters. Layamon has here added a great deal of material to his sources, much of it Celtic in origin.³⁰ For instance, in the Afallennau, one of the Welsh Myrddin poems, Myrddin stands under an apple tree from which he derives powers of invisibility as well as powers of vaticination.³¹ Layamon seems to recall at least something of this legend in the detail of the tree and in his insistence that Merlin is found in the west, the direction of the Celtic otherworld. It appears that Layamon, too, has heard of the oral traditions mentioned by Geoffrey in his dedication.

Probably the scenes which describe the arming of Arthur are also dependent on oral traditions because although the arming of the hero is a type scene of epic poetry several details of Arthur's war dress appear to be taken from Celtic

legend. Much of the information is not available in other sources. For example, Arthur's sword "Caliburn," was made in Avalon with magic crafts (21139-40), and similarly, his spear, "Ron," was fabricated in Caermarthen by a smith named Griffin (23783-84). The report that his burny, "Wygar," was made by an elvish smith, "Witege," is likely drawn from Germanic rather than Celtic lore because it is strongly reminiscent of the Germanic legend about the magician-smith, Weland. But the name of Arthur's helmet, "Goswhit," meaning Goose-white, Madden suggests, should be taken as the interpretation of a British epithet.³² The general practice of giving proper names to the different articles of armour, of course, has a long history in epic poetry.³³

Similar traditions, in terms of content and style both, are seen in the Brut's marvellous depiction of the passing of Arthur. In a number of places the Brut exhibits a phenomenon known as nunnation, which is the addition of a final "n" to certain cases of nouns and adjectives, some tenses of verbs and several other parts of speech. As Madden notes, it may have been used for the sake of rhyme or, perhaps, is a special feature of Layamon's dialect. In the later manuscript, Cotton Otho C. xiii, this extra "n" has been eliminated in several places, and obviously there was some question as to the propriety of its usage.³⁴ Its usage, however, is extremely effective in the description of Arthur's departure for Avalon, the Celtic otherworld.

Æfne þan worden;
þer com of se wenden.
þat wes an sceort bat liden

sceouen mid uðen.
 and twa wimmen þer inne;
 wunderliche idihte.
 and heo nomen Arður anan;
 and aneouste hine uereden.
 and softe hine adun leiden;
 and forð gunnen liden. (28622-28631)

(Even with the words there approached from the sea that was a short boat, floating with the waves; and two women therein, wondrously formed; and they took Arthur anon, and bare him quickly, and laid him softly down, and forth they gan depart.)

The repeated "n" sounds in this passage contribute to the lilt, to the sense of gentle motion. Sound reinforces meaning. The inclusion of colloquial elements strengthens Layamon's poetic achievement in this case and the propriety of the extra "n" is thereby established.

The total effect, however, of these traditions surrounding Arthur's departure is to move him away from the convention of the epic hero--it shows that he, like Merlin, is exempt from death. While there is no doubt that the story of Arthur is "part of the prevailing consciousness of the people," to use Abercrombie's phrase, and while the several aspects of his character probably do represent "the accepted unconscious metaphysic of his age," Arthur is ineligible for the title of epic hero because he is something more than human. One might argue that he has many characteristics of the typical romance hero.³⁵ His character does not undergo change or development--his valor at the end of his reign is of the same stern, absolute sort as at the beginning; his association with elves and the fairy otherworld at birth and at departure gives his career a cyclic quality typical of romance; and finally his immortality aligns him with the heroes of romance

who seem to be immune from the encroachments of age and death. However, opposed to this argument that Arthur might derive some of his qualities from the romance hero is the total absence of the sort of sophistication generally associated with the romance hero and the undeniable political significance of Arthur's reign. The Saxon invasion is checked so long as Arthur is in power but it returns immediately upon his disappearance. A more plausible explanation of Arthur's extra-human capabilities is not that he inherits qualities from romance, a tradition chronologically posterior to epic, but that he derives some of his attributes from pre-heroic poetry. Bowra calls pre-heroic poetry "shamanistic" and asserts that the protagonist "has pride of place because he is a magician and knows how to control supernatural powers."³⁶ Certainly the character of Merlin, as presented in the Brut, fits this category while Arthur, insofar as he enlists the aid of supernatural beings to escape death, is something of a magician too.

Thus, Layamon, although writing a few hundred years after the Beowulf-poet, is essentially a more primitive author. Several of the materials he gathers from popular tradition in order to aggrandize his heroes are drawn from the realms of myth and magic, and because he is fascinated by these things he does not rationalize them but presents his narrative in a basically primitive form. More primitive, too, is the general emotional quality of Layamon's heroes; they have little psychological subtlety and they positively exult in their hatred of the enemy. The Brut is, then, an example of

the epic genre at an emergent stage. It employs a mixture of additions from popular lore and magic, and more purely heroic conventions. It shows a marked tendency to focus successive sections of the narrative around the dominant figure of a hero, but one suspects that this may result not from conscious literary technique but from Layamon's simple exuberance and enthusiasm for the heroes of Britain's past. The character of Brutus displays several parallels to the epic heroes of classical literature; Belin and Brennes are modelled more strictly on the Anglo-Saxon concept of a hero; and Arthur exhibits many qualities common to both classical and medieval heroes. Arthur, in fact, comes very close to being a full-fledged epic hero: his character is presented by means of numerous heroic conventions; for a long stretch of the narrative, every action and every detail is related to his dominating presence; and the fate of the nation depends directly on his deeds. There are, however, as we have noted, one or two exceptions which place Arthur outside of the category of epic hero. His valor is too absolute; he is so unmitigatedly right that the epic interest in how a man can attempt to resolve the paradoxes of his humanity does not ever become a question in the Brut. Arthur has the stature, the energy, and the centrality to be an epic hero but there is no recognition scene between the hero and his mortality.

IV. AN ELEVATED STYLE

Although the dominating presence of a hero is one of the most noticeable characteristics of epic, the genre has another element equally integral and sometimes more pervasive--the use of an elevated style. The grandeur of the hero is supported by a corresponding grandeur of language. C.S. Lewis claims that the writer of literary or secondary epic must grapple with a difficult problem in this regard because he has lost all those external aids to solemnity which the poet of primary epic enjoyed.

There is no robed and garlanded aoidos, no altar, not even a feast in a hall--only a private person reading a book in an armchair. Yet somehow or other, that private person must be made to feel that he is assisting at an august ritual, for if he does not, he will not be receptive of the true epic exhilaration. The sheer writing of the poem, therefore, must now do, of itself, what the whole occasion helped to do for Homer.¹

In other words, the style of written epic is ritualistic or incantatory because it intends to be so, and if we believe Lewis' argument, it ought to be so. The question of epic language, therefore, relates back to Jan de Vries' point, cited in the previous chapter, about the origin of epic being rooted in a cult. Lewis ends his defense of the heightened style:

The grandeur which the poet assumes in his poetic capacity should not arouse hostile reactions. It is for our benefit. He makes his epic a rite so that we may share it; the more ritual it becomes, the more we are elevated to the rank of participants. Precisely because the poet appears not as a private person, but as a Hierophant or Choregus, we are summoned not to

hear what one particular man thought and felt
 . . . but to take part, under his leadership,
 in a great mimetic dance. . . .²

The emphasis in this argument must fall on the poet as Hierophant or Choregus; because of his special skill and knowledge he occupies a privileged position in the community but remains essentially a part of that community. Thomas Greene states the point clearly.

In his language as in other things, the poet stands implicitly midway between the hero and his audience. He is the amphibian, the mediator, the messenger, the guide, who is inspired and inspires in turn. He is the knower of the Names, the speaker to those who cannot speak of high things. But he is not the actor; he, like the audience, has only heard of those things. He can say "we" to embrace himself and the audience, but never himself and the hero.³

This designation of the poet's place or role in epic is especially significant in the study of the Brut because Layamon, on occasion, appears to lose himself in his characters.

There is little doubt, however, that the language of the Brut gravitates toward an elevated style. J.S.P. Tatlock, remarking on the differences between the Caligula and Otho manuscripts of the Brut, reports that "the former is archaic in language, one may suspect deliberately so."⁴ If the archaisms are deliberate, they are probably part of a general attempt to suggest the heroic remoteness, the austere solemnity of the narrative. Certainly, a heightened style is particularly observable in the Arthurian section of the poem, and while it centers mostly on the character of Arthur himself it is noticeable in the depiction of others as well, especially Merlin. Part of Merlin's first prophecy, in fact,

insists that Arthur's story must be told in an elevated style. The prophecy, for which there is no hint in the French text and no real parallel in Geoffrey's History either, is cited by Layamon shortly before Merlin works his shapeshifting on Uther. It foretells the future of the son conceived during the union of Uther and Igerne and includes much general information about his prowess as a warrior, conqueror, and lawgiver. But the most interesting detail concerns the relationship of Arthur to the poets.

Al him scal abuze?
 þat wuned inne Bruttene.
 of him scullen gleomen?
 godliche singen.
 of his breosten scullen æten?
 adele scopes.
 scullen of his blode?
 beornes beon drunke. (18854-18861)

(All shall bow to him that dwelleth in Britain,
 of him shall gleemen sing; of his breast noble
 poets shall eat; of his blood shall men be drunk.)

The inspiration provided by Arthur, the ritualistic imagery of men eating his breast and becoming intoxicated by his blood, is obviously meant as a parallel to the Christian sacrament. Layamon considers the prophecy important enough to bear later repetition in nearly the same form (ll. 23029-23042). Relating the story of Arthur has become a poetic duty of religious significance and hence in this section one finds a stylistic intensity appropriate to a liturgical frame of mind.

Before exploring fully the particular aspects of epic technique in Layamon's style it is worthwhile to delineate the ways in which the Brut diverges from its French source.

So far, several isolated dissimilarities have been noted, but the difference between the two authors can be demonstrated most clearly by comparing the way each handles the meeting between Uther and Igerne. When Uther falls in love with Igerne, Wace waxes eloquent.

Li reis en ot oi parler
 E mult l'aveit oi loer;
 Ainz que nul semblant en feist,
 Veire assez ainz qu'il la veist,
 L'out il cuveitee e amee,
 Kar merveilles esteit loee.
 Mult l'ad al mangier esgardee,
 S'entente i ad tute turnee.
 Se il mangout, se il beveit,
 Se il parlout, se il taiseit,
 Tutes eures de li pensot
 E en travers la regardot.
 En regardant, li surrieit,
 E d'amur signe li faiseit.
 Par ses privez la saluot
 E ses presens li enveot,
 Mult li ad ris e mult cunied
 E maint semblant fait d'amistied;
 Ygerne issi se conteneit
 Qu'el n'otriout ne desdiseit. (8577-8595)

(The king had heard much talk of this lady, and never aught but praise. His eyes were ravished with her beauty. He loved her dearly, and coveted her hotly in his heart, for certainly she was marvellously praised. He might not refrain from looking upon her at table, and his hope and desire turned to her more and more. Whether he ate or drank, spoke or was silent, she was ever in his thought. He glanced aside at the lady, and smiled if she met his eye. All that he dared of love he showed. He saluted her by his privy page, and bestowed upon her a gift. He jested gaily with the dame, looking nicely upon her, and made a great semblance of friendship. Igerne was modest and discreet. She neither granted Uther's hope, nor denied. (trans. Eugene Mason, p. 36)

This situation shows traces of the psychological subtleties in the game of love which Chrétien de Troyes later exploited so competently. The lavish description of Uther's love and

flirtation is typical of the excess of a courtly lover. In addition, Wace hints at the psychological sparring upon which courtly love thrives. The whole scene, festive and gay, is described in a corresponding tone--light, civilized, and urbane. It is a tone which was to appear frequently in the genre of courtly romance.

Layamon attempts to follow his source but rather hesitantly and far less expansively.

Ofte he hire lokede on,
and leitede mid ejene.
ofte he his birles sende,
forn to hire borde.
ofte he hire loh to,
and makede hire letes.
and heo hine leofliche biheold,
ah ich næt whær heo hine luuede. (18538-18545)

(Oft he looked on her, and glanced with his eyes;
oft he sent his cup-bearers forth to her table;
oft he laughed at her, and made glances to her;
and she him lovingly beheld,--but I know not
whether she loved him.)

Phrases such as "ofte he hire lokede on" and "ofte he hire loh to" somehow seem to lack that sense of subtlety or delicacy which is present in Wace; even the sound of the words "lokede" and "loh" is heavy and cumbersome and the passage lacks the sense of spontaneous gaiety, of lightness of tone. The telltale phrase is "ah ich næt whær heo hine luuede." For Wace, the psychological indecision is part of the character of Igerne, who by withholding her favor both maintains power over the lover and acts with proper discretion in the presence of the husband. In Layamon, the psychological dilemma is transferred from the character to the narrator who does not understand the fine points of her

indecision and is simply puzzled by it. In this case Layamon is almost totally without a sense of detachment from his characters; his reaction to them is genuine and immediate, and he seems hardly aware that he is, or should be in control of the characters.

Layamon's difficulty with this passage results not only from an inability to appreciate the urbane tone of courtly romance (in fact, he was probably much less familiar with courtly ladies than was Wace) but also from his stricter sense of morality. In the battle against the Saxons which precedes the scene described above Layamon magnifies Uther's dependence on and appeal to Gorlois for help (18364 ff.). As a result, Uther's flirtation with Gorlois' wife must be seen as unscrupulous when contrasted with the devotion of his chief commander. Furthermore, Layamon carefully avoids any suggestion that Igerne is in collusion with Uther. When Uther enters Tintagel disguised as Gorlois, Igerne, certain that she is greeting her husband, speaks with proper wifely devotion. The speech is a narrative addition in the Brut.

Ut com Ygærne
ford to þan eorle.
and þas word seide
mid winsume wurde.
wilcume læuerd.
monne me leofest.
and wilcume Jurdan.
and Britæl is alswa.
beo 3e mid isunde.
to-dæled from þan kinge. (19018-19027)

(Out came Igerne forth to the earl, and said these words with winsome speech: "Welcome, lord, man to me dearest; and welcome, Jordan, and Britael is also;--be ye parted in safety from the king?"')

The stately grace of this speech is queenly, including an intimate personal address to her lord, a welcome to his retainers in which she fulfills her social function, and a general concern for their safety which illustrates her warm humanity. As a result, Igerne ranks with such women as Wealhtheow as a depiction of the British ideal of a noble woman. A consequence of the speech is that the illicit nature of the relationship is subdued--a consequence Layamon apparently desired because it makes Arthur, although conceived illicitly, more thoroughly and properly a British hero. Gorlois' death, some three hours before Arthur's conception helps to sanction the relationship as well. The whole episode, which describes the relationship of Uther and Igerne, serves to epitomize the comparative distinctions which must be made between Wace and Layamon. There are basic dissimilarities in mood and moral attitudes. The difference between Wace and Layamon is the difference between French romance and English epic.

The epic style of the Brut can be discussed more fully under two general headings: the use of oration, and the use of parataxis, that is, under relatively larger and smaller units of narrative structure. The frequent use of speeches in the Brut has already been remarked upon--almost all of Layamon's dramatic amplification is in the form of speeches. Each of Aristotle's three kinds of rhetoric, deliberative, forensic, and epideictic, is exhibited in these speeches, but more important is a general characteristic which Thomas Greene argues is typical of the epic genre.

Speech in the epic is ampler and more formal than common speech; it is the vehicle by which the political and moral associations of an action or image are commonly revealed, and by which they are situated in an historical context.⁵

Certainly, Igerne's speech, quoted above, which is epideictic or ceremonial, carries political and moral associations. It is political not only because it manifests the proper social behavior of a British woman but because it certifies the nobility of the mother of Arthur.

Similarly, Merlin's speeches are filled with political and moral associations relative to the character of Arthur and because many of them are uttered in the form of prophecy they have an incantatory quality characteristic of the elevated style.

Uther is of-longed;
æfter Ygærne pere hende.
wunder and swide;
after Gorloises wiue.
Ah longe is æuere;
þat he cummed nauere.
þat he heo biwinne;
bute þurh mine ginne.
for nis na wimmon treowere;
in pissere worlde-riche.
And neodeles he scal aȝe;
þa hende Ygærne.
on hir he scal streonen;
þat scal wide sturien.
he scal streonien hire onr
æne swide sellichne mon.
Longe beoð æuere;
dædne bið he næuere.
þe wile þe þis world stænt;
ilæsten scal is wordmunt. (18832-18851)

(Uther is desirous after Ygaerne the fair, wondrously much, after Gorloises wife. But so long as is eternity, that shall never come, that he obtain her, but through my strategem; for there is no woman truer in this world's realm. And nevertheless he shall possess the fair Ygaerne; and he shall beget on her what shall widely rule; he shall

beget on her a man exceeding marvellous. So long as is eterny, he shall never die; the while that this world standeth, his glory shall last.)

In this speech the reader participates in what Lewis calls "a great mimetic dance;" it has a chant-like, ritualistic quality seen, for example, in the repetition of "Ygærne the fair," "Gorloises wife," "no woman truer," "the fair Ygærne," in the repetition beginning with the formula "he shall beget on her," and in the repeated phrases which mean that Arthur's glory shall be eternal. Such variation and repetition is a distinctive oral technique of English epic poetry.⁶ What in other circumstances might be considered tedious is here tolerated because of the spirit of exhilaration that it conveys in relation to the character of Arthur. In view of this exuberance Merlin's epideictic speech is necessarily ampler and more formal than common speech.

But Merlin is shown to be skilled in the use of an elevated style in other kinds of speech as well--particularly in what is essentially a forensic speech. When Vortigern seeks to build his castle on the mountain of Reir his magicians advise him that the walls will not stand unless they are mortared with the blood of a fatherless child. Because Merlin's father apparently was an "incubus demon," Merlin is selected. (It should be noted at this point that Layamon certainly proves himself to be the Knower of Names: Merlin's grandfather is called Conan, the reeve of Caermarthen is Eli, Merlin's playmate is Dinabuz, and

Vortigern's chief magician is Joram. None of these is supplied by Wace.) Merlin is forced to defend himself and in doing so he uses language in several ways typical of the elevated style of epic--his speech may be variously described as flyting, prophecy, game, and weapon. Structurally, the scene is set off by two passages of dialogue between Merlin and Vortigern. It begins when Merlin asks why he has been brought before the king and Vortigern answers:

swide þe longedr
after laðe spelle. (15808-09)

("Much thou longest after loath speech.")

It ends when Vortigern asks about things to come and Merlin answers:

ich þe walle suggest
ah æuere hit wule þe reouwen. (16046-47)

("I will say to thee; but ever it will thee rue.")

The complete reversal of their positions indicates the dramatic development that has taken place during the scene demonstrating that Merlin has successfully defended himself.

Although the confrontation between Merlin and Joram appears to take the form of a dialogue, it is not really one because Joram is never able to answer any of Merlin's questions.

Rather, the dumbfounded magician serves as a foil to Merlin's prophetic powers. The affair acquires the appearance of a competition when Merlin says, after hearing that his blood is to be sprinkled in the mortar to make the walls stand:

. . . þis sæte Joram
þe is mi fulle ifa.
þa tidende me punched game
ich wes iscæpen him to bone. (15854-57)

(. . . Joram said this, who is my full foe; the tidings seem to me sport; I was shapen to his bane!)

The contest which follows has the highly formulaic pattern of a game, a game which, as line 15857 suggests, Merlin controls and which reveals his exultant confidence in his own powers. He picks up the word "~~sæde~~" and ironically plays on the disparity between what Joram had previously said and what he is at present unable to say. He repeatedly uses the phrase "sæie me, Joram," qualifying the name with a variety of hostile epithets. This formulaic device is almost like battle flyting; it becomes a way of taunting the enemy. The narrator heightens the contrast with the repeated sentence:

Joram wes stiller
ne cude he noht tellen.

(Joram was still; he could not tell)

which occurs at lines 15839, 15912, and with variation at line 15928, and which is immediately followed in each case by the phrase "þa seide Merlin" and the appropriate explanation. Interspersed throughout is the formulaic phrase which points toward the outcome of the "game," "King, hald me forward" (King, hold to me covenant). Merlin's skill with language becomes, in fact, the weapon with which he successfully defends himself; his derision of the enemy, his constant reminders of the covenant, and his ability to predict correctly what lies beneath the castle walls (a stone, a pool of water, and two fighting dragons who incidentally betoken the conflict between the Britons and the Saxons) are welded together to form a precise and complex strategy against the evil magicians.

The king keeps the covenant and Joram, along with seven of his comrades, loses his head without a moment's delay. The whole episode is imbued with excitement mostly as a result of the intense concentration on language skills--the correct use of language becomes a matter of life and death.

Part of Merlin's frequent use of an elevated style is caused by his prophetic gifts because prophecy, by definition, is a formal declaration often calling for an incantatory style. Other types of speeches, similar in form and function to prophecy and also traditionally employed in epic writing, are means of heightened visualization such as a pageant vision of the future (like the one Anchises shows Aeneas), or a prophetic dream (like the one Charlemagne has before the battle at Roncevaux). One of Layamon's most striking amplifications of the French narrative involves the prophetic dream Arthur has shortly before the treachery of Modred and his queen is revealed to him. The amplification, in fact, includes, in addition to the dream, a fine dramatic scene in the subsequent conversation between Arthur and his messenger and then between Arthur and his nobles. Thomas Greene suggests that the epic poet habitually avoids simple exposition in favor of deliberative episodes.⁷ This preference is clearly evident in Layamon when studied in contrast to his sources.

Geoffrey, after announcing the crime, says:

About this particular matter, most noble Duke, Geoffrey of Monmouth prefers to say nothing. He will, however, in his own poor style and without wasting words, describe the battle which our most famous king fought against his nephew. . . .⁸

In Wace, the announcement receives a similar terse dismissal. In Layamon, however, a knight arrives with the tidings and the narrator comments ironically that to

Ardure he wes wilcume,
for he wende þat he brohte
boden swide gode. (27997-27999)

(to Arthur he was welcome, for he weened that he brought news most good.)

The messenger spends all night without revealing the truth to Arthur until the morning when Arthur announces that he has had a dream and summarizes it. He was astride the roof of a hall and looked over all the lands that he possessed. Walwain was seated in front of him. Modred and Wenhaver approached and started to tear down the hall causing Walwain to fall and break his arms. Arthur drew his sword, cut off Modred's head, hacked the queen into pieces, and placed her in a black pit. Afterwards, Arthur wandered alone on the moors until a lion and a fish transported him across the sea to land, where they left him wet, weary, sorry, and sick. The dream with its nightmare elements vividly foreshadows what is to come. It is a spectacle filled with unexplained and sensational details which register that sense of awe and mystery so typical of the epic style. In addition, Arthur's powers of divination suggest an alliance with the supernatural; he is like Charlemagne in The Song of Roland who, with his flowing white beard and his unfathomable age, is the vicegerent of God. In fact, Charlemagne's prophetic dream is similar to Arthur's in that it exposes treachery and foreshadows death.⁹

Despite the prophetic dream, the messenger-knight, fearful perhaps of Arthur's reaction, continues to procrastinate and relates his tidings in a roundabout way by resorting to the subjunctive.

3if it weore ilimpe.
swa nulle hit ure drihte.
þat Modred þire suster sune.
hafde þine quene inume.
and al þi kineliche lond.
isæt an his aȝere hond. (28102-07)

(If it were befallen,--as will it not our Lord!--
that Modred, thy sisters son, had taken thy queen,
and set all thy royal land in his own hand. . . .)

Arthur, in reaction to this suggestion, only affirms his faith in the loyalty of Modred and Wenhaver, so that, finally, the knight is forced to admit that what he has said is not hypothetical, but true. At this point, R.H. Fletcher argues that

Here Layamon's art fails him, and he makes no adequate use of the fine situation which he has prepared; but up to this point his treatment is admirably dramatic.¹⁰

It is difficult to agree with Fletcher's argument. After the knight's sorrowful tidings have been announced what could be more dramatically appropriate than:

þat sæth hit al stille.
in Arðure halle? (28154-55)

(Then sat it all still in Arthur's hall.)

After a short space of silence, the sympathy of Arthur's knights gains a voice and the scene becomes a confused clamour of indignation and demand for vengeance. Dramatically, the action of the knights is fitting. Arthur then silences the confusion with a command that is typical of the absolute

control which Layamon is at pains to illustrate in Arthur's character in every part of the story. It is all the more effective for appearing in this emotionally charged moment.

Ardur þa cleopede ✓
 hendest alre Brutte.
 Sittedadun stille ✓
 cnihtes inne halle.
 and ich eou telle wulle ✓
 spellles uncude. (28170-28175)

(Arthur then called, fairest of all Britons: "Sit ye down still, knights in hall, and I will you tell strange discourse.")

Arthur's speech reiterates the plea for vengeance but in a very orderly way. He plans to slay Modred, burn Wenhaver, destroy all those involved in the treachery, and then return to conquer Rome. Walwain speaks next pledging his support, and then all the Britons follow suit declaring their loyalty. Clearly, the latter part of the scene is dramatically effective.

This series of speeches, in fact, serves to emphasize the nobility of Arthur's character because it shows how intimately his personal life, his relationship to his wife and nephew, is bound up with the fortune of the nation. Arthur's firm control over his emotions is evident throughout all stages of the episode; he refuses to engage in a guessing game with the messenger-knight, standing by the facts as he knows them; yet when the truth is out he governs himself and his people with a fierce but organized plan. Nor is there ever any doubt but that the plan is just. However, Arthur's control over emotion does not mean that he lacks feeling. A haunting melancholy surrounds his recitation

of his phantasmal dream and in a comment following the dream-summary, a touch of nostalgic regret.

Wale þat ich nabbe here,
Wenhauer mine quene. (28092-93)

("Alas! that I have not here Wenhaver, my queen!")

Layamon suffuses the historic moment with the thoughts, feelings, and words of his characters. His handling of the whole episode, dividing it off into a series of deliberative speeches, makes it much more visual than the simple expositions of Geoffrey and Wace. In epic, the political event becomes spectacle.

While speeches are one of the chief means by which epic attains a heightened visualization, they are also used to convey "the quality of heroic energy, the superabundant vitality which charges character and image and action alike."¹¹ In the Brut the most superb examples of "superabundant vitality" are to be found in the extended similes, the best of which are uttered by Arthur in the heat of battle. Similes, of course, are a characteristic device in classical epic, but their appearance on a grand scale in the Brut is unique in medieval literature of this time.¹² In Homer and Virgil extended similes are often prized for providing a varied and detailed picture of the contemporary world. But this is hardly their function in the Brut. As H.S. Davies first remarked,¹³ nearly all of the long similes occur in the short space of the narrative describing Arthur's Saxon campaign. Furthermore, several of them are so much alike that they might have been fashioned according to a single

formula or pattern. These similes all project a mood of ferocity and they often depend for their strength on a comparison of the Saxon leaders to animals being hunted down and destroyed. In every case but one, the dominant impression is one of vigorous movement and energy.

For example, the simile comparing the Saxon leader, Childric, to a hunted fox shows extreme animation, an effect which is heightened by masterful handling of the alliterative line. Here is the last half of the simile where the movement reaches a climax.

Ah þene sizet him to
 segges under beorȝen.
 mid hornen mid hundene
 mid hazere stefenen.
 huntene þar talied.
 hundes þer galied.
 þene vox drive
 ȝeond dales and ȝeond dunes.
 he ulih to þan holme
 and his hol iseched.
 i þan uirste ænde
 i þan hōlle wende.
 þenne is þe balde vox
 blissen al bideled.
 and mon him to-delued
 on ælchere heluen.
 þene beoð þer forcudest
 deoren alre pruttest.
 Swa wes Childric
 þan strongen and þan riche. (20853-20872)

(But when come to him the men under the hills, with horns, with hounds, with loud cries; the hunters there hollow, the hounds there give tongue, they drive the fox over dales and over downs he fleeth to the holm, and seeketh his hole; in the furthest end of the hole he goeth; then is the bold fox of bliss all deprived, and men dig to him on each side; then is there most wretched the proudest of all animals! So it was with Childric, the strong and the rich.)

The short staccato phrases, combined with the series of vigorous verbs, transmit a sense of muscular energy. One is

almost sorry that the simile must end--there is an animal pathos in the image of the fox at the furthest end of his hole. A typical piece of Anglo-Saxon diction, "fæie-sih" (death-journey), is used at line 21398 to describe what happens to the enemy in a sense which allows the compound to stand as a sort of microcosm for several of the extended similes. The fox-Childric analogy, for instance, dramatises the meaning of "fæie-sih" vividly; the confusion and panic of the trapped animal is unmistakable.

The most sophisticated simile takes this process one step further and visually represents the condition of a creature after the completion of its "fæie-sih" by comparing dead warriors with steel fish.

þa 3et cleopede Arður:
 adest kingen.
 3urstendæi wes Baldulf:
 cnihten alre baldest.
 nu he stant on hulle:
 And Auene bi-haldest.
 hu liged i þan stræme:
 stelene fisses.
 mid sweorde bi-georeder
 heore sund is awemmed.
 heore scalen wleoted:
 swulc gold-fage sceldes.
 þer fleoted heore spiten:
 swulc hit spæren weoren.
 þis beoð seolcude þing:
 isizen to pissen londe.
 swulche deor an hulle:
 swulche fisses in walle. (21317-21334)

(The yet called Arthur, noblest of kings: "Yesterday was Baldulf of all Knights boldest, but now he standeth on the hill, and beholdeth the Avon, how the steel fishes lie in the stream! Armed with sword, their life is destroyed; their scales float like gold-dyed shields; there float their fins, as if it were spears. These are marvellous things come, to this land; such beasts on the hill, such fishes in the stream!)

Dorothy Everett has carefully explained how this simile works:

the effectiveness of this image depends on the reversal of the normal order of its terms which has the effect of slowing down the comprehension of it. We see with Baldulf the river filled with gleaming fish, and only gradually comes the recognition that these fish are dead warriors.¹⁴

Further, the warriors, now that they are dead, are of a lower order than fish and so they come second in the comparison; in fact, they are not even like real fish but are like "steel fish," an epithet which emphasizes their total and eternal immobility.

By contrast, the similes which describe Arthur are charged with an elemental energy. The steel fish simile follows almost without pause on the heels of a simile in which Arthur compares himself to a wolf stalking a goat, namely Colgrim, who is, in fact, the beast on the hill mentioned in the latter part of the steel fish simile. Arthur boasts that even if there were five hundred such goats the wolf would destroy them all. This is the second occasion on which Arthur is compared to a wolf. The first (the earliest appearance in the poem of a long-tailed simile) describes Arthur entering battle like a howling wolf bedecked with snow who rushes out of the forest and intends to devour such creatures as he will (20120ff.) The wolf in Anglo-Saxon poetry is traditionally one of the beasts of battle, known for his ferocity and for his depredations on the bodies of those who are unfortunate enough to die in conflict.¹⁵ Thus, both in the vigorous imagery surrounding his hero and in the intensely mocking

speeches delivered by him, Layamon creates a heightened style which conveys the heroic energy of Arthur.

A noticeable feature of this part of the narrative is the fierce, uncompromising character of Arthur and his absolute contempt for the enemy. Part of H.S. Davies' argument concerning an alternative source, other than Wace, for this part of the narrative has to do with what he calls "Layamon's psychological novelties."¹⁶ He claims that this section is far more barbaric and primitive in feeling than is the corresponding sections of Wace, that Arthur's exultations are quite unlike his conduct towards his other enemies, and that the similes contain the main substance of the exultations. Davies is probably right about Layamon here employing an alternative source but the extent to which he enters the spirit of that source is remarkable. His participation in the mood of exultation shows up clearly in one simile which is delivered directly by the narrator instead of being spoken by Arthur. The Saxons have been driven to the edge of a deep water:

Summe heo gunnen wondrien
 swa doð þe wilda cron.
 i þan mordenne
 þenne his flocc is awemmed.
 and him halded after
 hauekes swifte.
 hundes i þan reode
 mid reoude hine imeted.
 þenne nis him neouder god
 no þat lond no þat flod.
 hauekes hine smited
 hundes hine bited.
 þenne bið þe kinewurde foðel
 fæie on his side. (20162-20175)

(Some they gan wander, as the wild crane doth in

the moorfen, when his flight is impaired, and swift hawks pursue after him, and hounds with mischief meet him in the reeds; then is neither good to him, nor the land, nor the flood; the hawks him smite, the hounds him bite, then is the royal fowl at his death-time!)

This simile, in many respects, is very similar to several of the others, involving the frantic attempt to escape, the impaired movement, and the image of the trapped animal. It ends explicitly with a variation of the compound "fæie-sih." Whereas all the other exulting, extended similes are uttered by Arthur, this one, apparently, is spoken directly by Layamon himself. This fact is one more indication that Layamon lacks a sense of distance with respect to his characters. His mood and attitude correspond very closely to that of his characters, especially to his greatest hero, Arthur.

Although his subjective participation in the narrative probably generates a good deal of the zest and vitality of the action, Layamon's inability to detach himself from his characters prevents him from grasping the full significance of the simile as a literary technique. As a result, the stylistic device which is most characteristic of classical epic is only partially and temporarily realized in the Brut. Even the speeches, which Layamon employs consistently throughout the poem in order to amplify the narrative, are sometimes uneven in quality so that the elevated style, insofar as it depends on orations, is only sporadically maintained. For example, Arthur's Roman campaign is described at rather tiresome lengths. Although Layamon is not solely

to blame since he is merely transmitting a tradition begun by Geoffrey of Monmouth, his tone in this section is noticeably more pedestrian than in Arthur's Saxon campaign.¹⁷

A less ostentatious element of style than the epic simile is the use of parataxis, which has to do with the way individual lines are put together. Erich Auerbach's argument, summarized in chapter I, claims that the use of parataxis is what distinguishes medieval epic most clearly from classical epic. Auerbach bases his argument mostly on the Old French epic The Song of Roland in which he demonstrates that parataxis is consistent not only with the poet's method of characterization but with his philosophic and thematic outlook as well. Certainly, the Old English alliterative line, with its formulaic phrasing and four stresses, lends itself readily to paratactic structure. Layamon, especially, though he employs a longer, looser line than that of "classical" Old English verse, respects the integrity of the line, avoiding enjambment and preferring, if necessary, to add an expletive tag in order that the line may end with a full stop.

What is not so obvious, however, is the way in which parataxis can contribute to the cultivation of an elevated style. Parataxis is the mode of ritualistic narration because incantatory language, by its nature, omits causal connections and involved periodic structure. For instance, battle descriptions in the Brut are almost invariably paratactic.

Cnihtes gunnen riden.
 gæres gunnen gliden.
 breken bræde speren.
 brusleden sceldes.
 helmes þer scenden.
 scalkes feollen. (19550-19555)

(Knights gan to ride, spears gan to glide, broad
 spears break, shivered shields,--helm there were
 severed, men fell!)

The unconnected clauses simulate the chaos of battle, helped, of course, by the onomatopoetic diction (especially the verbs) and the explosive quality of alliteration. Such structure helps to create the sense of ritual participation in, or re-enactment of, British victory or British defeat. To modify the argument of C.S. Lewis, the important thing is not one man's impressions of the distinctive features of each battle but the mimetic dance which allows everyone to experience the excitement of a past heroic action.

Similarly, the use of what J.S.P. Tatlock calls epic formulas,¹⁸ inserted paratactically into the narrative, is meant to elicit a stock response. For example, the exultant cry over the death of enemies: "hælden into hælle / hædene hundes" (fall into hell--heathen hounds) is a commonplace medieval reaction to the death of heathen persisting as late, at least, as Malory. In the same way, a call to battle is often preceded by the phrase "whar beo 3e mine cnihtes" (20617) (where be ye, my knights) or some variation of it which makes the reader's blood tingle because he knows exactly what to expect. It is as formulaic and as stirring as a bugle call, gaining in effectiveness because it has been repeated in similar situations many times. Finally, a

formulaic structure typical of Anglo-Saxon heroic poetry is the application of a stock epithet to the hero. For example:

Arður þa cleopede.
hendest alre Brutte.

(Arthur then called, fairest of all Britons)

This type of phrase serves as a heading for numerous speeches; the magnitude of the hero appears to make some such epithet necessary; the fulness of his glory calls for a corresponding fulness of appellation.

However, parataxis employed in this manner contributes to an elevated style only in a limited sense. Battle descriptions will create a mood of excitement and exhilaration only if one feels that the cause of battle is noble; otherwise, they become empty, flat and monotonous. Arthur's title will not confer an epic grandeur upon him unless that grandeur is also evident in his deeds. Auerbach's essential point is that in the medieval epic paratactic structure becomes the chief method of conveying the solemnity and importance of heroic action.

It appears to me that the first elevated style of the European Middle Ages arose at the moment when the single event is filled with life. That is why this style is so rich in individual scenes of great effectiveness, scenes in which only a very few characters confront one another, in which the gestures and speeches of a brief occurrence come out in sharp relief. The characters, facing one another at close quarters, without much room for movement, nevertheless stand there as individuals clearly set off from one another. What is said of them never degenerates into mere talk; it always remains a solemn statement in which every address, every phrase, and indeed every word, has a value of its own, separate and emphatic,

with no trace of softness and no relaxed flow.¹⁹
 The 'separate and emphatic scenes created by this structure delimit and highlight the significance of each character and each action. Every scene is marked off or contained in a separate individual frame.

Layamon's Brut, like the Old French heroic epic, exhibits a rigid structural concept of reality which succeeds in representing a narrow portion of objective life. Consider, for example, the following passage.

Nú comen to þan kinge?	
neowe tidinde.	
Ardur þe balde kinge?	
sat at ane borde.	
biuoren him seten kinges?	24735
and feole here-ðringes.	
biscopes and clærekes?	
and swide ohte cnihtes.	
þer comen in to halle?	
spelles seolcude.	40
þer comen twalf þeines ohte?	
mid palle bi-þehte.	
hæþe here-kempem?	
hehþe men on wepne.	
ælc hafde on heonde?	45
grætne ring of golde.	
and mid æne bende of golde?	
ælc hafde his hæfd biuonge.	
Æuer tweie and tweie?	
tuhte to-sumne.	50
ælc mid his honde?	
heold his iuere.	
and gliden ouer ulore?	
biuoren Ardure.	
swa longe þat heo comen?	55
bi-uoren Ardure þan leod-kinge.	
Heo grættæn Ardure anan?	
mid adelen heore worden.	
Hal seo þu Ardur king?	
Bruttene deorling. (24731-24760)	

(Now came to the king new tidings! Arthur the bold king sate at a bord; before him sate kings, and many chieftains; bishops and clerks, and knights most brave. There came into the hall marvellous tales!--there came twelve thanes bold,

clad with pall; noble warriors, noblemen with weapon; each had on hand a great ring of gold, and with a band of gold each had his head incircled. Ever two and two walked together; each with his hand held his companion; and glided over the floor before Arthur, so long that they came before Arthur, the sovereign. They greeted Arthur anon with their noble words: "Hail be thou, Arthur king, darling of Britons.)

In terms of the overall development of the story this passage is a high point in the narrative because it involves a confrontation between Rome and Britain. The twelve messengers come from the Roman emperor, Lucius, demanding tribute from Britain on the basis of the argument that Julius Caesar had conquered the land in former times. Arthur, at this time, is at the very height of his glory; the passages preceding this one describe in lavish detail his plenary court at Caerleon. He subsequently rejects the demand for tribute, deciding instead to conquer Rome himself on the basis of the argument that several of his ancestors, beginning with Belin and Brennes, had done so. Keenly aware of the magnitude of the occasion, Layamon greatly amplifies the narrative in order to set the stage appropriately. The passage has an essentially paratactic structure. The word "now" which begins the passage is only a very loose temporal connection with what went before, its chief function being to mark off the beginning of a new scene, a new mood. What follows is the grouping of several impressive figures who serve to underscore the central splendor of the king. Even within this assemblage, however, the figures are isolated into smaller groups--kings and chieftains;

bishops and clerks; brave knights. Lines 24739-40 (þer comen in to halle / spellen scolcude) are interesting insofar as they repeat in substance the meaning of the opening two lines of the passage. They represent a new beginning from the same point in time. While the preceding lines delineate a picture of Arthur and company, the following lines describe the messengers by piling on cumulative details: bold thanes, clad with pall, gold in hand, gold around the head. Although presented contiguously, the two pictures are meant to be viewed simultaneously. Such is the purpose of the new start at line 24739. Auerbach calls this process "epic retardation,"²⁰ although, unlike epic retardation in Homer, it is not managed through interpolations and digressions, but through progression and retrogression within the principal action itself. Parataxis thus becomes the means of ordering the manifold, simultaneous imagery of a grand scene.

There are, however, some structural difficulties in the passage. The information that the messengers glided over the floor in front of Arthur until they came in front of Arthur is simply redundant, as is the announcement that they greeted Arthur with noble words followed by the greeting with noble words. Layamon apparently attempts a hypotactic construction in line 24755 with the connective phrase "swa longe" which should indicate a temporal and spatial relationship. That is, the sentence could be rendered-- they walked two by two, holding hands, until they came before Arthur. The poet, however, does not have confidence

in the communicative power of his connective phrase and represents the movement instead by a series of paratactic constructions: ever two and two walked together; each held his companion by the hand; they glided over the floor; they came before Arthur. As a result, the action is represented not as one continuous flowing motion but as a series of independent scenes--like a group of photographs as opposed to a motion picture. Thus, the connective phrase "swa longe" becomes merely an extraneous expression which only serves to complicate the verse movement and which shows that the poet is not fully aware of his own technique. Layamon seems to feel that this fairly rigid structure--a series of isolated and emphatic scenes--bestows a greater sense of dignity on his characters. And so it does. The latter part of the passage, however, because it is slightly clumsy, is less successful than the first part.

The use of paratactic structure in Layamon is not simply confined to one episode or to infrequent occurrences, but is a general characteristic throughout. It seems to harmonize with his view of the hero, Arthur, austere and aloof in heroic perfection. Auerbach claims that

Confronting the reality of life, this style is neither able nor willing to deal with its breadths or depths. It is limited in time, place, and social milieu. It simplifies the events of the past by stylizing and idealizing them. The feeling it seeks to arouse in its auditor is admiration and amazement for a distant world, whose instincts and ideals, though they certainly remain his own, yet evolve in such uncompromising purity and freedom, in comparison with the friction and resistance of real life, as his practical existence could not possibly attain.²¹

Layamon's reworking of the narrative everywhere tends to stylize and idealize the towering exemplary figure of Arthur. When Wace recites the debate which follows the challenge from Rome he describes the friendly bantering of Cador and Walwain while they ascend the steps of a stone tower. Cador welcomes the threat of war as a remedy for idleness while Walwain extols the merits of peace because he enjoys the pleasure of songs and the love of ladies. In Layamon the fluent, connective syntax of the courtly style is abandoned for the stern paratactic style of medieval epic. When the king and his counsellors move to the old stone tower no one speaks along the way and, in fact, even within the tower no one dares to speak for awe of the mighty king (24891-98). The solemn scene in the hall is replaced by an equally solemn scene in the tower. When the knights do speak it is with ceremonial seriousness. Each speech operates as an independent unit. Walwain's praise of peace dwells on the benefits it brings to the nation--all mention of ladies and chivalry is omitted; Cador's attack on idleness becomes a diatribe against deadly sin--it is no longer merely discommodious. The whole purpose of the solemn atmosphere appears to be to create admiration and amazement for the absolute valor of Arthur. Without any reference whatever to the advice of his counsellors Arthur makes his own decision to invade Rome and announces it with paratactic bluntness. None of the deliberations suggests the complex possibilities and uncertainties which are likely to result from this decision.

The paratactic style of the narrative makes the issues clear-cut and unambiguous. Although the Roman campaign will keep Arthur away from Britain for more than nine years during which time civil war under the direction of Modred will undermine Arthur's government from within, there is simply no question but that Arthur's decision is the right one. Inherent in his situation is the unresolved conflict between the hero as king (with the attendant responsibilities to the nation involved in that role) and the hero as warrior (with an unquenchable desire for glory) but there is absolutely no mention of it. When Arthur finishes speaking, his nobles once again remain silent for some time (25119-25128). It does not seem to be a matter of approving or reproaching Arthur's intentions, but simply a matter of hearing them; those intentions are spelled out in paratactic aloofness. Thus, Layamon is able to use parataxis to create his own elevated style; the grandeur of the hero is supported by a corresponding grandeur of language.

The heroic remoteness of the elevated style in some ways obviates personality as an artistic goal because the peculiar features of a hero's personality are invariably superseded and partially obscured by an overwhelming sense of his heroic energy. Layamon's poem, although it does not quite succeed in presenting an epic hero, does succeed, in the Arthurian section especially, in creating an elevated style--an epic style. The first stage in the development of this style is an almost complete departure from the

courtly romance style of Wace's French narrative. As well, the process involves dramatic amplification mostly by way of speeches which are formal and political in the Brut. The purpose of these speeches ranges all the way from being a means of heightened visualization, such as in Arthur's prophetic dreams, to being a way of communicating intense exhilaration, such as is found in the epic similes. Finally, the use of paratactic structure is the most pervasive element of Layamon's high style, both because it helps to create a mood of incantation, and because it emphasizes the independent self-sufficiency and singular excellence of his heroes. The presence of an elevated or epic style accounts for the fact that the Brut can be most profitably discussed in terms of epic traditions, although in several ways it falls short of the epic genre.

V. CONCLUSION

Layamon's Brut is most properly designated an emergent epic. Because of his own peculiar gifts and personal attitudes, almost everything the medieval priest provides to enrich his inherited story tends in the direction of epic, but the Brut is an emergent epic because Layamon is too literate to produce a primary epic and too unsophisticated to produce a full-fledged secondary epic. Throughout this study a precise and categorical definition of the term "epic" has been diligently avoided--with good reason. The intention has been not to force the poem into one fixed, a priori definition but to examine what affiliations a long narrative poem might have in common with several of the best long narrative poems which precede it. In this way one hopes to gain a fuller understanding of a literary genre. Epic is a complex form, perhaps the most complex of literary forms, although, paradoxically, it elicits a simple definition from those intrepid authorities who attempt it. The basic simplicity of definition is merely a way of doing the least possible damage to the multitudinous intricacies of the genre; such definitions are invariably supplemented by references to those poems which are customarily thought of as epic. Hence, the Oxford English Dictionary and a literary handbook such as M.H. Abrams' A Glossary of Literary Terms are in basic agreement. An epic is

a long narrative poem on a great and serious subject, related in an elevated style, and

centered on a heroic or quasi-divine figure on whose actions depends the fate of a tribe, a nation, or the human race.¹

Some authorities, wishing to extend the range of the term, delete the stipulation of "a heroic or quasi-divine figure." Ultimately, what matters is not so much the comprehensiveness of a definition but the usefulness of viewing any literary work in the terms of a specialized literary category at all. How is one's appreciation of the Brut extended by viewing the poem in terms of epic traditions? Thomas Greene's point, cited in chapter one, is that no single poem fully embodies what he calls the norms of epic, and, therefore, the student attempts to determine the degree to which various works participate in the epic mode. Furthermore, almost every major epic has necessitated re-definition of the genre. Although Layamon's poem exhibits its own unique blend of epic conventions it does not belong to this category. The question remains therefore. Why is it that the Brut, which in many ways is so obviously not epic, is best understood by referring it to that genre, and is, in fact, properly a part of that genre?

The features which are not epic are easily identified. There is not one major hero around whom the action is unified, nor is the narrative confined to one major action. Although in The Song of Roland the role of protagonist is shared by two heroes, Charlemagne and Roland, they cooperate and unite, as director and executor, to fulfill the composite role of defender of Christendom. The Brut follows

the chronicle tradition by describing a series of heroes involved in a series of incidents. This narrative structure is simply additive. It does not begin in medias res and hence lacks the complex resonances which result as the past and future unfold together. Nor does it have the multi-layered, intricate action of such allegories as The Divine Comedy or The Faerie Queene which are sometimes claimed as epic poems.² Instead, the narrative pace of the Brut, like that of the heroic lay, is straightforward and fairly rapid. Large sections of the poem might accurately be described as a connecting thread of heroic lays. Finally, the opening of Layamon's poem is humble, for there is no invocation to a muse and no pretence "that some great thing is now about to begin."³

An preost wes on leoden?
 Lazamon wes ihoten.
 he wes Leouenades sone?
 lide him beo drihten.
 he wonede at Ernleze?
 at ædelen are chirechen.
 vppen Seuarne stader?
 sel þar him þuhte.
 on fest Radestone?
 þer he bock radde.
 Hit com him on mode?
 and on his mern þonke.
 þet he wolde of Engle?
 þa ædelæn tellen.
 wat heo ihoten weoren?
 and wonene heo comen.
 þa Englene londe?
 ærest ahten. (1-18)

(There was a priest on earth, who was named Layamon; he was son of Leovenath,--may the Lord be gracious to him:--he dwelt at Ernley, at a noble church upon Severns bank,--good it there seemed to him--near Radestone, where he books read. It came to him in mind, and in his chief thought, that he would tell the noble deeds of

the English, what they were named, and whence they came, who first possessed the English land. . . .)

The poet's picture of himself is one of rustic simplicity containing the rudimentary details of his life, where he lives, who his father is, what things matter to him; namely, the people among whom he lives, the books he reads, the church, and the Lord. However, it is this simple rusticity which generates Layamon's enthusiasm and propels him toward epic. He is motivated chiefly by patriotic impulses. Resisting the influence of twelfth century trends he retreats to the past for the form of his narrative additions as well as for the content of his story. As we have noticed on a number of occasions, he does not have the urbane sophistication to appreciate the subtleties of courtly romance, and, furthermore, does not consider it solemn, serious, or moral enough to confer an appropriate dignity on the narrative. Layamon's dependence on books and his citation of such ecclesiastical authorities as Bede, Albin, and Augustine, in addition to the French clerk Robert Wace, suggest that he thought of himself as a historian providing a true account of British antiquity interpreted correctly.

However, as Robert Hanning has shown,⁴ British historiography was no simple matter at the time Layamon was writing. Hanning demonstrates that the theology of history, a tradition developed by such writers as Eusebius and Orosius, was popularized in Britain through the influence of Gildas and especially, the Venerable Bede.

Ecclesiastical history asserts that the events of the past represent a development or progress toward the fulfillment of a divine plan; the actions of a social or political hero are intertwined and identified with the fortunes of the nation in order to typify the providential scheme of history. Hanning astutely observes that Virgil's Aeneid offers the same sort of synthesis of history mythically presented and philosophically oriented.⁵ In a few brief references to the seminal significance of Noah's flood, in the Pope Gregory story borrowed from Bede, and in a radical shift in racial sympathy near the end of the narrative (a shift actuated by righteous indignation) Layamon intimates a desire to follow the ecclesiastical tradition. Human action is ultimately subject to the will of God. However, the sweep of Geoffrey's chronicle historiography dominates the greater part of Layamon's revision with profound effect on the type of poem Layamon finally produces. Opposed to the ecclesiastical tradition, Geoffrey's nationalistic, secular History of the Kings of Britain depicts an endless cycle in which the rise and fall of powerful individuals is the dominant image. Rather than being united or identified, personal fulfillment and national destiny often stand in direct opposition to one another. In this way Geoffrey's work frequently presents a basic situation more akin to heroic epic, which manifests the greatness of human and personal tragedy built up against a background of meaningless flux,⁶ than to national

epic.

Although Geoffrey himself attempts to project the impression of a fact-finding, objective historian, his narrative is replete with intense dramatic situations in embryo form. Over and over dramatic tension is created between personal needs and desires and national stability, the crux of the situation often involving some kind of special relationship: between two brothers, between uncle and nephew, or even between father and daughter.⁷ A tribute to the tremendous psychological power and subtlety inherent in Geoffrey's narrative incidents is the number of times they have provided the basic source material for superb dramas, most notably by Shakespeare. Layamon, on the other hand, is not sophisticated enough to exploit the psychological complexity inherent in the situations in which his characters find themselves, but instead he develops the narrative in another direction, glorifying the noble ancestors of Britain by amplifying the external actions of those heroes. Externalized, objectified action is a well-known, general characteristic of the epic genre. In classical and medieval epic alike the hero exercises his talents in a public context; he harbours no subconscious secrets. Not shrewd and detached like Geoffrey, Layamon is naive and enthralled. He is engaged and exhilarated by the courageous exploits of British heroes, and, unlike Geoffrey, has no scruples about celebrating these deeds in an elevated style in ways already demonstrated.

As a result, although translating a work well on its

way toward the genre of courtly romance, and although inheriting a shifting tradition of historiography, Layamon resorts to the epic mode. His enthusiasm for a noble ancestry motivates him to employ whatever techniques and popular traditions are available in order to aggrandize his heroes. If Layamon were less literate, less well acquainted with books, he might well have produced a primary epic because he shows a tendency to expand the narrative with the actions and speeches of heroes. Although never breaking away entirely from the chronicle form his story is more hero-oriented than that of either of his predecessors. Furthermore, Layamon's narrative bears some marks of oral delivery, notably in its use of epic formulas and its use of such minstrel expletives as:

hærcne nu seollic þing. (19931)

(hearken now a marvellous thing)

That the oral tradition was still very much alive is proven by the fact that, as most authorities believe, the later manuscript of the Brut, BM Otho C xiii, was written down from memory.⁸ It is also clear that popular oral traditions have been used to supplement the history on all sides, but it is difficult to pursue the question of sources further than this general observation. A speculative critic like R.S. Loomis is willing to ascribe certain additions to Breton sources,⁹ but there is also evidence that material has been drawn from Germanic, Anglo-Saxon, Welsh, and Irish lore. As an antiquarian Layamon is very much alive to the

marvels of the past, particularly to details surrounding the character of Arthur.

Arthur calls forth the best Layamon has to offer; in Arthur he creates the embodiment of a British ideal. A provider to his people, a stern but just lawgiver, a leader in battle, the magnificent king is a model of heroic perfection. Arthur is also a dutiful son displaying ferocious courage in pursuit of vengeance against the Saxons for the death of his father and uncle. Layamon produces his most intense poetry in the conflicts where Arthur personally takes charge, his most mysterious poetry in Arthur's description of Loch Lomond, and his most lyrical poetry in the scene of Arthur's departure. In fact, Layamon's unqualified admiration for this exemplary figure creates a character so absolutely superlative that insofar as he is not subject to ignorance, or to foolhardiness, or above all to death, Arthur passes beyond the ken of the epic hero.

This same intense fascination with the character of his hero causes Layamon to employ several stylistic devices which produce an exalted and liturgical state of mind, but which sometimes lack a sense of critical control. Nowhere is this better illustrated than in two striking features of the Brut's style--epic simile and paratactic structure. The long simile is essentially a classical device which is famous for its range and flexibility. By definition an epic simile must extend over several lines, and hence depends on fluent, connective syntax. At its

best in Homer and Virgil it is a masterly technique providing a glimpse of the poet's contemporary world, commenting on the narrative action, and displaying the interrelated significance of the phenomenological world. In the Brut, although exhibiting power and vividness in their own right, the long similes show a more limited mastery of the technique. They are all of one type and are all used to one purpose. In addition, Layamon himself seems not to have been satisfied with the device for he abandons it after only a short trial period. This is not surprising because the Brut's most pervasive stylistic feature, paratactic structure, is basically antithetical to the epic simile. The one is static and rigid while the other is fluent and discursive. In other words, the disappearance of the long simile may perhaps not be due so much to the poet's failure to understand its effectiveness but to the impossibility of adapting the device to the technique of paratactic structure which is the major technique of Layamon's elevated style. Although the concept of parataxis is generally applied to the way individual phrases and lines are put together, it also serves to describe the cumulative effect of a series of independent scenes. Nearly all of Layamon's additions take the form of a series of independent verbal blocks, as characters confront one another in heroic solemnity. For example, the coronation of Arthur, the events leading to the founding of the Round Table, and the announcement of Modred's treachery all have this quality. Paratactic structure does for medieval narrative

what the heavy gold borders do for medieval manuscript illumination. Characters are set out in splendid isolation. Since Layamon's patriotism is embodied in a number of heroic personages culminating in Arthur, splendid isolation is the effect he most desires. Thus, parataxis is the chief mode of Layamon's elevated style.

The presence of such conflicting elements of style in the same poem seems to illustrate that Layamon is in the process of discovering a suitable form for his narrative while in the very midst of writing. The Brut, as we have it, is, as it were, a rough draft which never reached final copy; in this sense it is an emergent epic. This judgment is not at all a disparagement of Layamon's achievement; rather the amazing mixture of classical and medieval epic conventions is a tribute to his quick and soaring imagination which celebrates the noble deeds of British antiquity. The Brut is a narrative tapestry, solemn, intense, and exuberant, a worthy participant in the tradition of epic.

NOTES

CHAPTER I

¹ Sir Frederic Madden, ed., Layamons Brut, or Chronicle of Britain (London, 1847; rpt. Osnabruck: Otto Zeller, 1967), I, p. 2, ll. 13, 14. All subsequent references are to this edition in three volumes and line numbers will be cited parenthetically in the text. Quotations are uniformly taken from BM Cotton Caligula A ix, unless otherwise noted. Abbreviations are silently expanded. In each case the quotation will be followed by Sir Frederic Madden's translation.

² The question of the Brut's date is by no means settled, estimates ranging from as early as 1189 to as late as 1207. A brief summary of the problem is presented by R.S. Loomis, "Layamon's Brut," in ALMA, ed. R.S. Loomis (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1959), p. 104.

³ Lewis Thorpe, "Introduction" to The History of the Kings of Britain by Geoffrey of Monmouth, trans. Lewis Thorpe (1966; rpt. Harmondworth: Penguin Books, 1968), p. 9. Thorpe summarizes the evidence for dating Geoffrey's work in "Notes to the Introduction," pp. 38-40.

⁴ Ivor Arnold, "Introduction" to Le Roman de Brut de Wace Tome I, ed. I. Arnold (Paris: Societe des Anciens Textes Francais, 1938), p. LXXVII.

⁵ Robert W. Ackerman pays tribute to Madden's significance as an editor and as the Keeper of Manuscripts in the British Museum in "Sir Frederic Madden and Medieval Scholarship," Neuphilologische Mitteilungen 1-2, LXXIII (1972), 1-14. Madden first examined the earlier Layamon manuscript, BM Cotton Caligula A ix, in 1824 but it was nearly three years before he discovered the shrivelled vellum fragments of BM Otho C xiii, thought to have been destroyed in the 1731 Cottonian fire. This discovery led the Society of Antiquaries to sponsor a printed edition of the poem begun under Madden's direction in 1831 and finally completed in 1847.

⁶ Sir Frederic Madden, "Preface" to Layamons Brut (London, 1847; rpt. Osnabruck: Otto Zeller, 1967), I, p. vii.

⁷ Madden, I, p. xxiv.

⁸ R.H. Fletcher, The Arthurian Material in the Chronicles (Boston, 1906; rpt. New York: Burt Franklin, 1958), p. 156.

9 J.W.H. Atkins, "Early Transition English" in The Cambridge History of English Literature, I, eds. A.W. Ward and A.R. Waller (Cambridge: The University Press, 1908), p. 263.

10 J.S.P. Tatlock, "Epic Formulas, Especially in Layamon," PMLA, 38 (1923), 529n.

11 Tatlock, "Layamon's Poetic Style and Its Relations," in The Manly Anniversary Studies in Language and Literature (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1923), p. 11.

12 Tatlock, The Legendary History of Britain (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1950), p. 485.

13 H.C. Wyld, "Layamon as an English Poet," RES, VI (1930), 1-30.

14 Dorothy Everett, "Layamon and the Earliest Middle English Alliterative Verse" in Essays on Middle English Literature, ed. P. Kean (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1955), pp. 22-45.

15 Wyld, "Studies in the Diction of Layamon's Brut," Language, X (1933), p. 47.

16 Everett, p. 37.

17 Everett, p. 45.

18 Everett, p. 28. Before leaving the discussion of Everett's essay it is fair to remark that not all of her comments are derogatory. It has been necessary here to emphasize the negative criticism as a balance to the overly facile praise of many Layamon commentators. She is especially helpful in analyzing Layamon's sensitivity to the emotional quality of a scene and, in fact, discovers his real strength in moments of tension or suspense.

19 Fr. Klaeber, for example, reports in the introduction to his edition of Beowulf (1922; rpt. Boston: D.C. Heath and Company, 1950), p. lxiv, that "similes of the Homeric order are entirely lacking" in the Beowulf.

20 H.S. Davies, "Layamon's Similes," RES new series, XI (1960), 131.

21 This critical survey omits reference to two recent important essays on the Brut. One is R.S. Loomis, "Layamon's Brut," in ALMA, pp. 104-111, and the other is C.S. Lewis, "Introduction," to Selections from Layamon's "Brut", ed. G.L. Brook (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1963), pp. vii-xxi. Both essays provide an excellent synthesis of scholarly

opinion on the poem. While such a synthesis is very helpful, the intention here is to organize a survey of critical appreciation around the question of how Layamon's Brut relates to the epic genre.

22 F.L. Gillespy, "Layamon's Brut: A Comparative Study in Narrative Art," in Univ. of Calif. Pub. in Mod. Phil. III, no. 4, (Nov. 1916), 361-510.

23 H. Ringbom, "Studies in the Narrative Technique of Beowulf and Lawman's Brut," in Acta Academiae Aboensis, Ser. A., Vol. 36, nr. 2 (Abo: Abo Akademi, 1968). Ringbom attempts to be statistical and exhaustive, and, while it is not certain that this leads to a clearer understanding of the poems, it leads, at least, to the impression of thoroughness.

24 Ringbom, p. 143.

25 Ringbom, p. 137.

26 Ringbom, p. 154.

27 C.M. Bowra, Heroic Poetry (1952; rpt. London: Macmillan and Company Ltd., 1961).

28 A. Campbell, "The Old English Epic Style," in English and Medieval Studies Presented to J.R.R. Tolkien on the Occasion of his Seventieth Birthday, eds. Norman Davis and C.L. Wrenn (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1962), pp. 13-26. Alan M. Markman "The Meaning of Sir Gawain and the Green Knight," PMLA, 72 (1957), 574-586.

29 Ringbom, p. 147.

30 E.R. Curtius, European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages, trans. Willard R. Trask (New York: Pantheon Books, 1953), p. 168.

31 R.R. Bolgar, The Classical Heritage (Cambridge: The University Press, 1954), p. 192.

32 Robert Graves, "Introduction," to Pharsalia, trans. Robert Graves (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1956), p. 13.

33 Tatlock, The Legendary History of Britain, p. 494.

34 Paul M. Clogon, ed., The Medieval Achilleid of Statius (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1968), p. 4.

35 W.P. Ker, Epic and Romance (London, 1896; rpt. New York: Dover Publications Inc., 1957). See especially pp. 322ff.

36 Erich Auerbach, Mimesis, trans. Willard R. Trask (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1953), p. 122.

37 John Finlayson, ed., Morte Arthure (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1971), pp. 1-11.

38 Auerbach, pp. 95-122.

39 Auerbach, p. 116.

40 For example, the illuminations of The Trinity College Apocalypse, Facsimile edition, no. 114 (London: Eugrammia Press, n.d.) show a concentration on figures and their actions while the setting is limited to a few properties. The heavily colored background makes the men and beasts stand out tangibly, while the lack of setting gives the figures a visionary quality. Similarly, J.A. Herbert, Illuminated Manuscripts (New York: Burt Franklin, 1911), p. 209, comments that the illuminations of an eighth century Spanish version of the Apocalypse are characterized by a hieratic solemnity, a geometrical order in the visions of glory and adoration, and the use of gold, heavy coloring and solidly painted backgrounds. In other words, manuscript illumination seems to be ordered on the same rigid, gestural principles that Auerbach discovers in medieval narrative.

41 Auerbach, p. 115.

42 Thomas Greene, The Descent From Heaven (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1963), p. 9. Especially helpful is Greene's first chapter, "The Norms of Epic," in which he discusses epic norms under the following categories: imagery and the expansiveness of the epic imagination, the hero and the limitations of heroic will, structure and the conflict between director and executor of heroic actions, and language or the use of elevated style in epic.

CHAPTER II

1 C.S. Lewis, A Preface to "Paradise Lost" (1942; rpt. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969), p. 1.

2 Historically, crown-wearing ceremonies were a frequent occurrence in England before and during Layamon's time. Dorothy Whitelock, describing kingship in the eighth, ninth, and tenth centuries, remarks that all were "concerned with their visible splendor . . . [for example] King Edgar showed by his impressive coronation ceremony at Bath in 973 that he grasped the political value of external magnificence." The Beginnings of English Society (1952; rpt.

Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1965), pp. 49-50. In the same vein, Lewis Thorpe, p. 226n., notes that William the Conqueror wore his crown in state in Winchester every Easter, in Westminster at Whitsuntide, and in Gloucester at Christmas.

3 Geoffrey of Monmouth, The History of the Kings of Britain, trans. Lewis Thorpe (1966; rpt. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1968), p. 51.

4 Robert Hanning, The Vision of History in Early Britain From Gildas to Geoffrey of Monmouth (New York and London: Columbia Press, 1966), p. 171.

5 Such, at any rate, is the estimation of Lucan given by John Clark, A History of Epic Poetry (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1900).

6 Geoffrey of Monmouth, p. 117.

7 Clark, p. 113.

8 Both F.L. Gillespy, "Layamon's Brut: A Comparative Study in Narrative Art," and H.C. Wyld, "Layamon as an English Poet" are, at times, less than fair to Wace in their eagerness to promote Layamon. The two authors are so different in temperament that comparisons are misleading on both sides. Wace's strength is often Layamon's weakness and vice versa.

9 Courtly love sentiments are particularly evident in exchanges between Uther and Ygerne ll. 8571ff., and in the behavior of Gawain ll. 10765ff. Line references are to the text edited in two volumes by Ivor Arnold, Le Roman de Brut de Wace (Paris: Societe des Anciens Textes Francais, 1940).

10 Nennius, "Historia Brittonum," in Old English Chronicles, trans. J.A. Giles (London: George Bell and Sons, 1908), p. 391.

11 Hanning, p. 106.

12 Layamon has added more than one hundred lines (29450-29552) recounting the story of Pope Gregory and the English children. Neither Geoffrey nor Wace mentions the story.

13 Bede, Ecclesiastical History of the English People, trans. Bertram Colgrave and R.A.B. Mynors (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1969), pp. 133-135.

14 Hanning, p. 106.

15 Bede, pp. 163ff.

16 Nennius, p. 383.

17 Gildas, "De excidio Britanniae" in Old English Chronicles, trans. J.A. Giles (London: George Bell and Sons, 1908), p. 295.

18 That debt is analyzed most cogently by Dorothy Everett, pp. 22-45.

19 Gillespy, p. 504.

20 Tatlock, The Legendary History of Britain, p. 497. The corresponding lines from The Proverbs of Alfred are: "wurpe þat i-wurpe / wurpe godes wille." H.P. South, ed., The Proverbs of Alfred (New York: New York University Press, 1931), p. 123, ll. 500-501.

21 Geoffrey of Monmouth, p. 100.

22 Robert Wace, Le Roman de Brut, I, ed. I. Arnold (Paris: Societe des Anciens Textes Francais, 1940), ll. 3230-3232. All subsequent references are to this edition and will be cited parenthetically in the text.

23 Fr. Klaeber, ed., Beowulf and The Fight at Finnsburg, 3rd ed. (1922; rpt. Boston: D.C. Heath and Company, 1950), p. 119, ll. 3156-3165.

24 John R. Clark Hall, trans., Beowulf and the Finnesburg Fragment, 3rd ed., (1950; rpt. London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1958), pp. 176-177.

25 Loomis, p. 105.

26 Madden, III, p. 510.

27 Gillespy, p. 474.

28 Madden, III, p. 426.

29 Madden, III, p. 433.

30 The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, for example, contains, in addition to The Battle of Brunanburg, several commendatory passages on Athelstan which reveal the same type of national sentiment as is found in Layamon. In the year 926 Athelstan brought into submission all the kings of the island and established a covenant of peace which forbade all idolatrous practices. G.N. Garmonsway, trans., The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle (1953; rpt. London: J.M. Dent and Sons Ltd., 1960), p. 107.

31 Madden, III, p. 388.

CHAPTER III

1 C.S. Lewis, "Introduction" to Selections from
Lazamon's "Brut," p. x.

2 Northrop Frye, Anatomy of Criticism (1957; rpt.
New York: Atheneum, 1966), pp. 33, 34.

3 Bowra, Heroic Poetry, p. 91. One writer who is skeptical that myth is a necessary element in heroic stories is H.M. Chadwick, The Heroic Age, (Cambridge: The University Press, 1912), pp. 130-150. Chadwick argues that sometimes traces of myth are late accretions to a story which originally was essentially human, perhaps even essentially historical (p. 149). He treats heroic story and myth as two fairly distinct categories, the former dealing with definite, though not always historical personalities, the latter including personifications of the heavenly bodies and natural phenomena (p. 130). Though of course the categories are not mutually exclusive, the distinction is useful in attempting to define the epic hero, whose character sometimes contains mythic elements which may either be traces of earlier stories or later accretions. On the whole, however, the character of the epic hero is substantially human.

4 Jan de Vries, Heroic Song and Heroic Legend, trans.
B.J. Timmer (London: Oxford University Press, 1963), p. 233.

5 Greene, p. 15.

6 H.M. and N.K. Chadwick, The Growth of Literature, I,
(1940; rpt. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968),
p. 15.

7 Everett, p. 45.

8 The pattern of the heroic life has been charted in a number of interesting studies--notably, Lord Raglan, The Hero (1936; rpt. London: Watts, 1949) and Joseph Campbell, The Hero With a Thousand Faces (New York: Pantheon Books, 1949). The summary presented here relies mostly on Bowra, Heroic Poetry, pp. 91-131 and de Vries, Heroic Song and Heroic Legend, pp. 210-226.

9 Helen M. Mustard, trans., "The Nibelungenlied" in
Medieval Epics (New York: The Modern Library, 1963), p. 302.

10 Geoffrey of Monmouth, p. 54.

11 Nennius, p. 388.

12 Rhonabwy's companions know beforehand that it will be good luck "for the one of them whose lot it would be to go

on that skin." G. and T. Jones, trans., "The Dream of Rhonabwy," in The Mabinogian (1949; rpt. London: J.M. Dent and Sons Ltd., 1970), pp. 138-139.

13 Geoffrey of Monmouth, p. 65.

14 Homer, The Odyssey, trans. E.V. Rieu (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1946), p. 209.

15 Campbell, p. 23.

16 Everett, p. 37.

17 John C. Pope, ed., Seven Old English Poems (New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1966), p. 10, ll. 39ff.

18 Historically, the Anglo-Saxon regard for treasure is shown by the beautifully decorated pieces found at Sutton Hoo. See R. Bruce-Mitford, The Sutton Hoo Ship-Burial: A Handbook, 2nd ed. (London: The British Museum, 1972).

19 Geoffrey of Monmouth, p. 89.

20 Pope, p. 27, ll. 309-319.

21 That heroic sentiments are not restricted to heroic poetry is seen in Aelfric's homily on St. Edmund. Edmund's words sound very similar to the speech of Belin-Brennes. "Næs mē nāfre ge.wuneliċ þæt ic worhte flēames, ac ic wolde swīpor sweltan, gif ic porfte, for mīnum āgnum earde, and se ælmihtiga God wāt þæt ic nylle ā.būgan fram his bī-gengum Æfre, ne fram his sōpan lufe, swelte ic, libbe ic." (It was never my custom to take flight, rather I would perish, if need be, for my own country, and the almighty God knows that I will not swerve from his worship ever, not from his true love, whether I die, or whether I live.) Norman Davis, ed., Sweet's Anglo-Saxon Primer, 9th ed. (1953; rpt. Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1967), p. 82.

22 Pope, p. 19, l. 89.

23 C.M. Bowra, From Virgil to Milton (1945; rpt. London: Macmillan and Company Ltd., 1967), p. 36.

24 Lascelles Abercrombie, The Epic (London: Martin Secker, n.d.), p. 39.

25 Geoffrey of Monmouth, p. 51.

26 These translations of the Old French are taken from Eugene Mason, trans., Arthurian Chronicles (1912; rpt. London: J.M. Dent and Sons Ltd., 1962), p. 43. Wherever possible this translation will be used, and page references will be cited parenthetically in the text.

27 The style and the content of the similes are treated more fully in the following chapter. Although irony may also be considered as a stylistic device it is so closely associated with the heroic character of Uther and Arthur as to merit attention here.

28 Ferocious irony is typical of the epic hero in the heat of battle. Even an urbane writer like Virgil gives the following speech to Aeneas.

Why put it off forever, Turnus, hang-dog?
We must fight with arms, not running.

The quotation is cited from Rolfe Humphries, trans., The Aeneid of Virgil (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1951), p. 368.

29 J.S.P. Tatlock, The Legendary History of Britain, p. 523.

30 See, especially, A.O. Jarman, "The Welsh Myrddin Poems" in ALMA, pp. 20-30. It is clear that Layamon's characterization of Merlin is even closer than Geoffrey's to the figure of Myrddin as described by Jarman. Living as he did near the Welsh border, Layamon could easily have known their stories about Myrddin through oral tradition.

31 Jarman, p. 21.

32 Madden, III, p. 377.

33 For example, Beowulf is given a sword named Hrunting by Unferth (Klaeber, l. 1457).

34 Madden, I, p. xxx.

35 An excellent discussion of the hero of romance is to be found in Erich Auerbach, Mimesis, pp. 123-142.

36 Bowra, Heroic Poetry, p. 92.

CHAPTER IV

1 C.S. Lewis, A Preface to "Paradise Lost", p. 40.

2 Lewis, p. 60.

3 Greene, p. 25.

4 Tatlock, The Legendary History of Britain, p. 483n.

5 Greene, p. 20.

6 C.S. Lewis argues that the technique of repetition, variation, or parallelism is what distinguishes Beowulf most sharply from Homer. See his chapter on the technique of primary epic in A Preface to "Paradise Lost," pp. 20-26.

7 Greene, p. 20.

8 Geoffrey of Monmouth, p. 257, 258.

9 Dorothy L. Sayers, trans. The Song of Roland (1957; rpt. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1970), p. 79.

10 R.H. Fletcher, p. 151.

11 Greene, p. 22.

12 C.S. Lewis, in his introduction to Selections from Layamon's "Brut," argues that, however it came about, the appearance of the long-tailed simile enriched the native poetic style. We must "still wonder whether this is due to the sheer leap of some remarkable genius or to the influence (possibly at many removes) of Virgil" (p. xii).

13 Davies, p. 131.

14 Everett, p. 42.

15 For example, in "The Battle of Brunanburh," Pope, p. 8, ll. 56ff., "pæt græge deor, / wulf on wealda" (that grey animal, the wolf in the forest) is one of the beasts who haunts the battlefield "hræw bryttian" (to divide the corpses) after Athelstan and his brother Edmund depart. Similarly, one of the gnomic verses in The Exeter Book, eds. G.P. Krapp and E.V.K. Dobbie (1936; rpt. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1966), p. 161, offers a vivid picture of the sinister connotations of the wolf.

Wineleas, wonsælig mon genimed him wulfas to gefaran,
felafæcne deor. Ful oft hine se gefera slited;
gryre sceal for greggum, græf deadum men;
hungre heofed, nales pætheafe bewinded,
ne huru wæl weped wulf se græga,
morporewealm mæcga, ac hit a mare wille.
(146-151)

(Unfriended, unblest, a man takes wolves for companions, a dangerous beast; full often that companion rends him. There shall be terror of the grey wolf; a grave for the dead man. It is grieved by hunger; it goes not around that grave with lamentation; the grey wolf weeps not indeed for the slaughter, the killing of men, but ever

wishes it greater.)

R.K. Gordon, trans., Anglo-Saxon Poetry (1926; rpt. London: J.M.Dent and Sons Ltd., 1959), p. 312. Hence, Layamon's association of Arthur with the wolf gives Arthur's character a peculiarly ferocious turn at this stage of the narrative.

16 Davies, p. 134.

17 One of the difficulties in a study of this kind is that in a poem of more than thirty-two thousand lines it is possible to discover a great number of good passages which deserve notice. Exclusive concentration on the best passages does not result in a balanced appreciation of the poem, yet in the case of the Brut, which suffers near obscurity, it seems excusable, even desirable to draw attention to its merits.

18 Tatlock, "Epic Formulas, Especially in Layamon," pp. 494ff.

19 Auerbach, p. 120.

20 Auerbach, p. 105.

21 Auerbach, p. 121.

CHAPTER V

1 M.H. Abrams, A Glossary of Literary Terms, 3rd ed. (1957; rpt. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1971), p. 49.

2 E.M.W. Tillyard makes this claim in The English Epic (1954; rpt. London: Chatto and Windus, 1966).

3 C.S. Lewis, A Preface to "Paradise Lost", p. 41.

4 Most of the following paragraph is indebted to Robert Hanning's The Vision of History in Early Britain.

5 Hanning, p. 19.

6 Lewis, A Preface to "Paradise Lost", p. 31, describes the heroic epic in this way.

7 Hanning, p. 143.

8 The suggestion was first made by Madden, I, p. xxxviii, and later taken up by Tatlock in The Legendary History of Britain, pp. 483-484 n.

9 Loomis, p. 109.

KEY TO ABBREVIATIONS

<u>ALMA</u>	<u>Arthurian Literature in the Middle Ages: A Collaborative History.</u>
<u>PMLA</u>	<u>Publications of the Modern Language Association.</u>
<u>RES</u>	<u>Review of English Studies.</u>

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